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SEP 25

TRUTH, BEAUTY, POLITICS

Arts and the State: The N.E.A. Debate In Perspective

PAUL MATTICK JR.

The struggle is against the right-wing agenda itself. (Page 348)

EDITORIAL

CONGRESS HELD HOSTAGE

The uses of President Bush's uncontrolled military buildup in the Persian Gulf were chillingly manifest in his pep talk to a joint session of Congress. He arrived wearing his popularity like a cowl. Sounding much like a boarding-school dean addressing students on their return from summer vacation, Bush giggled and grimaced, and warned his charges of the consequences of disobedience. House majority leader Richard Gephardt then demonstrated what passes for "bipartisanship" in foreign policy these days—surrender to the lies and deceptions of conspicuous imperial intervention.

The gulf war, droll though it may be for the moment, gave Bush the opportunity to plump for cutting the capital gains tax and against "punishing" the rich with higher marginal rates. He came out for more nuclear power and for ravaging the Alaskan wilderness in search of oil. He admitted that there will be no peace dividend and he all but promised that U.S. troops will stay in the gulf theater from here to eternity.

So far, only one Congressional voice, that of Texas Representative Henry Gonzalez, has been raised in angry opposition. "Do we or do we not have a Constitution?" Gonzalez asked in a letter to House Speaker Tom Foley. "Do we have a President? a Caesar? a monarch? a potentate? What happened to the checks and balances . . . and the . . . power invested in Congress to declare war?" Gonzalez wanted, at the very least, a debate on Bush's activities and his flouting of the War Powers Act. His letter and his plea have gone unanswered.

COMSTOCK'S LEGACY
BRUCE SHAPIRO

THE KUWAIT THING
DOUGLAS McGRATH

CREEPING CAPITALISM
DANIEL SINGER

A FINNISH MASTER
TIMOTHY CROUSE

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LETTERS.

BLOODBATH DEVALUED

Austin, Tex.

It is most distressing to see even the left press fall victim to the chronic underestimation of U.S. crimes. In his "Watching Rights" column in the July 9 issue, the presumably well-informed Aryeh Neier comments on Kathy Kadane's recent exposé regarding the U.S. role in the 1965-66 Indonesian bloodbath, "By the lowest estimate, 250,000 Communists and suspected supporters were murdered. . . . More commonly, it is estimated that 500,000 were killed." There are two serious problems with this statement. In the first place, those killed were not all "Communists" or even "suspected supporters." It is shameful indeed to adopt the very labels the mass-murderers used to justify their crimes.

Moreover, 500,000 is in fact the minimum figure. As Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman comment in *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism*, "The number killed in the Indonesian bloodbath has always been uncertain, but an authoritative minimum was established in October 1976 when Admiral Sudomo, the head of the Indonesian state security system, in an interview over a Dutch television station, estimated that more than 500,000 had been slaughtered. . . . Other authorities have given estimates running from 700,000 to many more than one million." In his lectures ex-C.I.A. agent John Stockwell puts the number at 800,000.

It is a most insidious bit of propaganda for an article criticizing a monstrous crime to devalue it by perhaps a half. *Benjamin Moss*

NEIER REPLIES

New York City

The premise that seems to underlie Moss's objection to my reference to the killing of "Communists and suspected supporters" (the latter is, of course, the vaguest of categories) is that it would help to legitimize those crimes if the victims were Communists. It is not a premise I share.

As to the number killed, I know of no reliable count. Among those who have published estimates, there are wide variations in the numbers. Since I have no basis for offering my own count, I took what I regard as the responsible course: I stated the lowest estimate and the most common estimate without endorsing either.

I deplore the tendency to make political points by presenting the highest estimates of the number of victims of various human rights abuses as if these were fact. Regrettably, it is a practice indulged in by some on the left (for example, claims that thousands of civilians were killed during the invasion of Panama) and by some on the right (for example, claims that the Sandinistas in Nicaragua held thousands of prisoners for peaceful political dissent). It is also possible, of course, to distort by understating. In the Indonesian case, however, the figures I cited involve so great a bloodbath that it seems preposterous to suggest that I understated the horror. *Aryeh Neier*

PLANTATION BLUES

Brussels

In an often bracingly hostile review ["Fight Harvard Fiercely," April 16], Felicia Kornbluh attacks the new version of *How Harvard Rules* and charges that I do not even so much as offer the reader the "plainspoken analysis" that "Harvard is much more than an ivy-covered haven from the machinations of the 'real world.'" I have to wonder if Kornbluh read the book. In the preface, the introduction and in the chapters on the cold war and the corporations, I refer over and over to "the mythology of Harvard's independence" from those machinations.

I showed Kornbluh's remarks to feminists and they chuckled at her grandiose claim that women's studies at Harvard is a hotbed of "counterhegemonic" scholarship and "an institution of radical significance." Even as late as 1989 Nina McCain of *The Boston Globe* declared frustration that none of the Harvard feminists she interviewed would go on the record with their critiques of Radcliffe's president and Harvard itself, hardly the behavior of an intelligentsia that is "counterhegemonic" and of "radical significance." Earlier, numerous feminists turned down a chance to contribute to *How Harvard Rules* on the ground that it might jeopardize the funding of women's studies, sad testimony to the limited boundaries of pluralism at John Harvard's plantation, where some male faculty openly stated that they would back the program because thankfully it had no radical feminist presence among the leadership. I may well merit Kornbluh's reproach for later soliciting and ultimately not receiving more contributions from her own student/feminist colleagues, but she writes as if we belong to the prefeminist Stone Age, even though feminism influences our critiques of such disparate subjects as Harvard's architectural ambience, the Skocpol affair, Irving Babbitt, scientific management, biology, sexual harassment, etc.

Kornbluh seems incensed at my pessimism about such avant-garde radicalism as deconstruction, saying that I do not explain why these ideas "can never challenge the status quo ante." That is partial rubbish. I criticize poststructuralists for declaring the end of politics. I also cite Terry Eagleton on its limitations, while later Jamin Raskin points to the lessons of Paul de Man, a thinker who, prior to the revelations of his collaborating past, could count on much adoration from a few of Harvard's leading feminists. For all of Kornbluh's apparent admiration for deconstruction, she fails to take its doctrine "nothing beyond the text" too seriously, for she would have read our book a little more carefully before setting out to pan it with such unmerciful glee. *John Trumpbour*

KORNBLUH REPLIES

Washington

I'm not bracingly hostile. There was a lot of great material in the book. I read every word, and I learned a lot. However, I might have learned more if there were less of the editor and more of other contributors, less on the (very important but not all-encompassing) relationship between Harvard and the cold war, and more on, say, feminism. Maybe Trumpbour should have spent less time writing and more time editing—paring away some facts, clarifying his model, bringing up the volume on other voices and perspectives and turning it down on the one that seems to be his—and that, as I argued in my review, sounds a lot like the late 1960s S.D.S./prefeminism crowd that created the original volume.

As for women's studies, I can't pretend that it will bring the walls of patriarchy, or any other great historical nasties, crashing down. But we work with what we have. Within the confines of the elite university, women's studies matters a lot; in a wider universe of social conflict, who knows? I'm arguing that if Afro-American studies (which is in much worse trouble than I knew when I wrote the review) is counterhegemonic, then so is women's studies. If Trumpbour's little book and my little radical newspaper count for anything, then so certainly does the work of feminist historians like Olwen Hufton, Sonya Michel, et al. *Felicia Kornbluh*

SLEAZE PROTECTED

New York City

Have you forgotten that constitutional protection also applies to the sleaziest of capitalists? I refer to Curtis Lang's editorial "Shady Customers" [July 30/Aug. 6] advocating use of a national "computerized database of all people charged with federal crimes . . . or named parties in federal lawsuits" in order to insure that certain individuals (the ones, we suspect, who got us into the S&L mess) are not permitted to buy foreclosed properties at fire-sale prices. The existence of such a database is scary enough. If it is put to the use Lang suggests, the presumption of innocence, the right to confront accusers and due process itself will be additional casualties of the S&L scandal. *Kathleen Peratis*
New York Civil Liberties Union

TRILLIN NO DYLAN

Seattle

There once was a writer named Trillin
Whose columns were funny and thrillin'.
But he gave up the prose
For a poetic pose
And now all his columns are killin'.
David A. Jones

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EDITORIALS.

A Helluva Town

New York is a city about money and death, the two things that America has mastered in this century. And since the wealth and the violence of a nation is ordinarily concentrated in its metropolis, it is hardly surprising that New York has so many murders and mergers, rapes and real estate rip-offs, drugs and deals. It is the reification of the American nightmare against the memory of the American dream, and it's no place like home.

A rather hefty (59 percent) majority of New Yorkers told a *Time*/CNN poll that they would like to escape from New York if they could. There must be thousands of reasons for such feelings, from air quality to attitude (both bad), but the current impetus is a summer spate of murders and random shootings visited upon very young children. The tabloids have proclaimed a "crime wave" and an "epidemic of violence." Much of the media heat has been directed against Mayor David Dinkins, a mainstream pol who is no more responsible for the mayhem than any other leader in any of the cities where social cohesion has disappeared.

But it is not just the murder rate that has dispirited the city's inhabitants. The multiple miseries of the place have reached critical mass in the past few years, so that now there is a sense of hopelessness along with the expected frustrations of urban life.

Everyone has excuses but no one has a plan. Felix Rohatyn, the smarmy banker who got credit for "saving" the city from a spurious bankruptcy in the 1970s (by handing economic control to his Wall Street friends), says the way to put New York back on track is to pay municipal workers less and break their unions. The new Speaker of the

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City Council would hire thousands more police (the majority would be white and from the suburbs, eminently unsuitable for duty in the city's black and brown combat zones) to be paid for by somebody other than his white ethnic constituents in Queens. Governor Mario Cuomo and other Democrats blame the tax policies and budget cutbacks of the Reagan years, as if (a) the Democrats didn't play Reagan's game themselves, (b) the problems of crime and decay began on January 20, 1981, and (c) they had a single idea other than electing, say, Cuomo or Sam Nunn to the White House.

More federal money would ease the pain of many people now afflicted, and that's important. But neither liberal welfare measures nor conservative police expansion will solve New York's problem, for it is really America's problem. Dinkins and the rest plead public poverty. The city is broke; it is taxed to the limit. But New York is the most outrageously wealthy metropolis in the world, with the possible exception of Kuwait City before the recent troubles. There's enough money in a few square miles of Wall Street, midtown and the Upper East Side to make everything work, give everyone a job and an apartment, and provide quality education. All that's required is a little readjustment, some aggressive accounting that will take a chunk of the billions (and the power that goes with the money) from those who hoard it, and will then distribute it by public investment and perhaps public enterprise to those who need it. It's as simple as that.

America has created a population (call it an "underclass" or anything that fits) and has given it all the values of the elite in familiar if distorted form. At the core, there's more similarity than difference between the S&L thieves in their Park Avenue triplexes and the Latino muggers on the D train platform, between the Pentagon's generals sending death to the barrios of the Third World and the armed and armored drug lords of Bed-Stuy. Greed, indiscipline and amorality drench the money-military culture, in its upper echelons and in its pits. Somebody destroyed the national superego. Does anyone have a plan to make one anew?

Mengistu's Game

As the United States rediscovers its strategic interest in the Red Sea, the Ethiopian government has renewed its diplomatic offensive in the West. Ethiopia's aim is to obtain weapons to stave off defeat in its civil wars; its tactics are to present itself as an ally of Israel surrounded by hostile Arabs and to offer a naval base on the Red Sea.

Ethiopia's strongman, Lieut. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam, faces defeat at the hands of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, which has captured all of Eritrea, Ethiopia's coastal province, except the capital, Asmara. That city is home to 425,000 people, and Mengistu has threatened to turn it into a rubble-strewn graveyard should it fall to the rebels. He has made similar threats against the Tigre People's Liberation Front, which is entrenched only a hundred miles from his own capital, Addis Ababa.

It is no idle boast. Mengistu commands 120 Soviet-built fighter-bombers, Antonov bombers and helicopter gunships. He has not hesitated to bomb cities in Ethiopia after they have fallen into rebel hands. Mekele, the capital of Tigre province, was bombed twice in 1989, and Massawa, Ethiopia's second port, was repeatedly attacked earlier this year. The raids burned 25,000 tons of food aid, wrecked the port installations and killed more than a hundred civilians. "Whenever Mengistu realizes he is defeated, he kills people with airplanes," said a victim, standing in the ruins of her house.

Two years ago Mengistu's bombers obliterated the small town of Hausien with napalm, phosphorus and high-explosive bombs. According to eyewitness testimony, as many as 1,800 people were killed. "You can't count grains of sand," said one survivor, recalling the bodies—many of which were still buried in the rubble six months later. By the threat of mass death from the air, Mengistu hopes to postpone—perhaps indefinitely—his defeat.

Ethiopia has already had some success getting weapons from the West to replace dwindling Soviet stocks. Mengistu has skillfully exploited his population of 15,000 Ethiopian Jews, known as Falashas, to obtain military assistance from Israel, suspended after the fall of Haile Selassie in 1974. Israel is anxious that the Falashas be allowed to leave to join relatives in Israel. Despite U.S. disapproval, the Israeli government has succumbed to the Ethiopian blackmail and has lobbied the State Department to drop its objections to arms sales, particularly of cluster bombs.

These bombs, which Israel developed with U.S. technology, are particularly lethal. They explode in midair, showering a hail of deadly bomblets over a wide area. A single cluster bomb that exploded over a crowded street in Massawa in April killed fifty townspeople and injured more than a hundred. Last year Israel sent Ethiopia 100 cluster bombs and other weaponry as well as military advisers. U.S. hostility to Mengistu has prevented further Israeli deliveries, despite two visits to the United States by Ethiopian officials (including Foreign Minister Tesfaye Dinka) who, with the assistance of Israeli lobbyists, met senior members of the Bush Administration. Although the Ethiopian overtures were rebuffed, other forms of Israeli military aid continue, and the Ethiopian officials will return.

Mengistu is now playing a game that is even more cynical. Pointing to the uncertain allegiances of his neighbors—Sudan, Djibouti, Somalia and Yemen—he is presenting himself as a more reliable ally in the Middle East. He also claims that the rebels fighting his government are pawns of the Arab states, intent on turning the Red Sea into an "Arab lake." But the rebel movements are led by Christians; also, the rebel provinces contain only a tiny minority of Arabs. For the past fifteen years of their nearly thirty-year war, these rebels have struggled against the largest and best-equipped army in black Africa. They are motivated by hatred of Mengistu's oppressive policies, not by foreign incitement.

For thirteen years the United States has shunned the Ethiopian government, citing its appalling human rights record. That record has not improved. High-sounding pronouncements in March about political pluralism were fol-

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lowed in May by the sudden secret execution of twelve army generals arrested a year ago for an attempted coup; student demonstrations against the executions were crushed violently. The United States and Israel should not be blackmailed by their concern for the Falashas, or tempted by friendly overtures from a falling tyrant, into providing munitions that will be used to kill and maim civilians. RAKIYA OMAAR

Rakiya Omaar is executive director of Africa Watch, a New York–based human rights organization.

Alden Whitman

In his fifty-second year on this wicked old planet, Alden Whitman concluded that there was one too many lines in Ecclesiastes. And just like that, he knew he could create something new under the sun. With *The New York Times* as his calling card, he'd travel the world interviewing its movers and shakers, promising them one thing only: They would never get to read what he wrote about them.

In all the history of journalism, including the caves, nobody ever thought to draw the future dead into their own obituaries, and if anybody had he would surely not have had the chutzpah to condition the deal on never seeing the product. "All is vanity, a striving after wind," says Ecclesiastes, and Alden knew better than to discard that wisdom. If they had the vanity he'd give 'em all the wind they wanted. He turned obits into an art form, he put the death page on Page One, and he gave us history on the hoof.

In the doing, he turned himself into the most sought-after reporter on the *Times*, which is to say in the world. After Alden Whitman there was no second act. Ho Chi Minh knew that, as did Pablo Picasso, Harry Truman, Francis Cardinal Spellman, Charlie Chaplin, Earl Warren, Henry Miller, Albert Schweitzer, Charles Lindbergh, Henry Luce, Maurice Chevalier, Joseph Kennedy, Helen Keller, Haile Selassie, Harry Bridges, Norman Thomas, Mies van der Rohe and Israel Schawartzberg.

All of the above lent themselves willingly to the Alden Whitman treatment, but none put it better than Israel Schawartzberg, who was not a Russian violinist or a Budapest conductor—forget about it. Izzy was the last great single-o act in the American-Jewish underworld, and so attracted the sharp eye of Whitman, who spent several nights with him a couple of months before Izzy met his Maker.

Schawartzberg was only 56 at the time and apparently in good health. But as soon as he concluded his interviews with Alden, he said to me, "When I go, I want you to call Alden Whitman first. Forget about my wife, forget about my brothers, forget about my father. Just remember to call Whitman. I want an Alden Whitman obit, otherwise no good!"

I was lunching with Alden at Sardi's when the call came that Izzy was gone. Izzy got the full treatment, across the top of the page, picture with it, and to hell with whoever else went that day, including a Big Steel executive. It was a terrific piece and it made the network news that night. Twenty years later, the day Alden Whitman died, I mentioned this incident to Arthur Gelb, who was the metropolitan editor of the *Times* during Whitman's flush years on the paper.

"He had uncanny timing," Gelb said. "When Alden Whitman did you, you died. It happened all the time. It was amazing. You might be larky, feeling younger than springtime, a glass of champagne in your hand, that night you made love to your wife. But after Alden Whitman came to call, you were history."

And now, as it must to all men . . . Alden Whitman.

I have done him short justice here, leaving out even the highlights: That he was a man of the left and a contributor to *The Nation.* That he refused to name names when the Senate went after him for his membership in the Communist Party and that he worked his way out of the cold storage the *Times* had put him in.

That he refused to give up when the wheelchair and blindness got him. That in the end, as in the beginning, he was a newspaperman. And that as such, he was subject to the only rule he could not change. As wrote Ben Hecht of a departed colleague on the Chicago *Journal* in 1920:

We know each other's daydreams
And the hopes that come to grief
For we write each other's obits
And they're Godalmighty brief.

SIDNEY ZION

Sidney Zion, a former reporter for The New York Times, *is the author of the novel* Markers.

NEXT WEEK

Diana R. Gordon on the omnibus crime bill; Randy Kehler on the peace movement now; Diane McWhorter on country-club bias.

Note: Kai Bird is sitting in for David Corn at our Washington office.

★

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Though Westerners hold borders sacred, now we're told
The Arab world has never shared that point of view.
And hostage taking was in Arab wars of old
Considered quite all right, so all sides took a few.
And autocrats they love like Englishmen love tea.
A holy war for Arabs never is a waste.
Iraq acts true to Lawrence (not D.H., T.E.).
I'm so relieved to know it's culturally based.

Calvin Trillin

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MINORITY REPORT.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Several years ago in Baghdad I sat having a clandestine drink with a man, whom I still had better call only by his first name, Yahya, who had been one of the country's few independent publishers. We met on a houseboat anchored in the Tigris River where there was not the least chance of being overheard; nevertheless, he displayed the symptoms of acute nervousness. He told me that the decrepit President Bakr had diabetes that would shortly finish him, and for the first time, as he discussed the implications of the succession, I heard the name Saddam Hussein. Hussein was much feared for the zeal he had displayed in the Special Army Bureau of the Ba'ath Party, a position he had used to control the security forces and to build up the right wing of the regime. As we talked, Yahya told me that he himself had been imprisoned by the pro-British colonial regime in the 1940s, by the nationalist revolutionary government of Qassim after 1958 and by the Ba'athists after 1968. In all cases he had been tortured, and in the third case his torture had been supervised by Nadim Kzar, head of the Ba'athist secret police and a man who, once an ally of Saddam, had been executed by him after an inner-party struggle. It was like talking to a worldly-wise Roman in the time of Claudius. Yahya left me in no doubt that his maltreatment by the Ba'athists had been the most severe, so I was surprised when he told me that they were the best government the country had enjoyed in his lifetime.

One occasionally finds this sort of sadomasochism among peoples who have suffered indignity at the hands of outsiders. The pathetic and dangerous yearning for a "strong" regime is the product of a sense of being wronged and powerless.

In order to dissolve the link between people like Yahya and people like Saddam, one should consider what led Saddam to make his gigantic miscalculation in the gulf. It is certainly possible for the United States to reconquer the whole of Kuwait if it chooses to do so, but such an outcome would only restore an untenable status quo. When the British drew the borders (see "Minority Report," September 17), they did so with the specific intention of denying Iraq access to the sea, and thus of making it more dependent on Britain. Sir Anthony Parsons, former foreign policy adviser to Margaret Thatcher, former envoy to the United Nations and hardened veteran of the region, put it like this only last month:

> In the Iraqi subconscious, Kuwait is part of Basra province, and the bloody British took it away from them. We protected our strategic interests rather successfully, but in doing so we didn't worry too much about the people living there. We created a situation where people felt they had been wronged.

The words "Basra province" are the ones to notice here. Saddam has in fact not only annexed Kuwait but partitioned it. Most of the former kingdom has been proclaimed a new province of Iraq, but the two islands of Bubiyan and Warbah and a narrow strip grandiosely renamed the Saddamiyat al-Mitlaa have been incorporated into the existing Basra. The Iraqis have never dropped some claim to this northeastern corner of Kuwait, and even if the West could install a client monarchy in Baghdad, the claim would still be pressed. The difficulty therefore is that Saddam could be confronted on the one point where Yahya would agree with him.

Of course, the air at once fills with cries that aggression must not be rewarded, that appeasement must not be tolerated and so forth. However, it would be criminal if war began without some effort being made to broker what is after all a longstanding dispute. If by this partition Saddam means to signal a fallback position, then why not explore it? It will have to be discussed someday, as will the allegedly nonnegotiable rights of the Kuwaiti ruling family. I know of one senior diplomat who has for some years been urging the Kuwaitis to consider a lease on the islands, in fairness not to Saddam but to Iraq. If the Kuwaitis refuse to bargain under duress, the West would be fighting to perpetuate a wrong as well as to redress one.

The danger at the moment is that President Bush, flush with his triumphs on the international stage, will seek to overthrow Saddam and also to create some permanent nexus of alliances in the region. It would be fascinating to know if he has any idea who ought to run Iraq, and it would also be interesting to know how long he would commit himself to the task. The Israeli right seems to take the view that no Arab state should be allowed to evolve beyond a certain level of strength and development; thus Carthage needs to be leveled every decade or so. Is this to be Washington's policy also?

The history of regional pacts isn't all that encouraging either. In 1951, the British proposed Arab membership in MEC, the Middle East Command, which was to include France, Turkey and the United States. Because it meant the presence of foreign troops and because it included the word "command," the emerging Arab states rejected the idea. After that the British proposed MEDO, the Middle East Defense Organization, broadening its proposed membership to include New Zealand and, for some inspired reason, South Africa. This too foundered. The Baghdad Pact, based on British supremacy in Iraq, managed to attract the United States as an observer member. But it fell apart after the Anglo-American interventions in Lebanon and Jordan in 1958 and the bloody fall of the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq that same year. The final replacement, CENTO, or Central Treaty Organization, marked the ascendancy of the United States and was patterned on NATO and SEATO. It included various non-Arab client states—Pakistan, Turkey and Iran—and disappeared off the map with the overthrow of the Shah.

Its putative replacement, sarcastically termed "Gulfo" by William Safire (who would prefer bombing Baghdad to building up the Saudis any day), is likewise based on one ruling dynasty—the Abdul Aziz family in Saudi Arabia—and its network of allies and dependents. Saddam may be a very poor imitation of Nasser, but he has unleashed forces that will make the Arab world harder to govern by proxy. It would be no wiser to put trust in the Saudi lot of princes than in their ill-starred predecessors.

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ARTICLES.

PRUDERY AND POWER

From Comstockery To Helmsmanship

Com•stock•ery, n. 1: strict censorship of materials considered obscene 2: censorious opposition to alleged immorality (as in literature)

BRUCE SHAPIRO

The morals of the nation's youth are threatened by "obscene, lewd and indecent" photographs "commonly, but mistakenly, called art." So-called artists, under the cloak of free expression, are producing material that "fans the flames of secret desires." In the past year, such sentiments have become almost unbearably familiar. But this particular salvo was fired at artists more than a century ago by a New York dry-goods-clerk-turned-morality-crusader named Anthony Comstock.

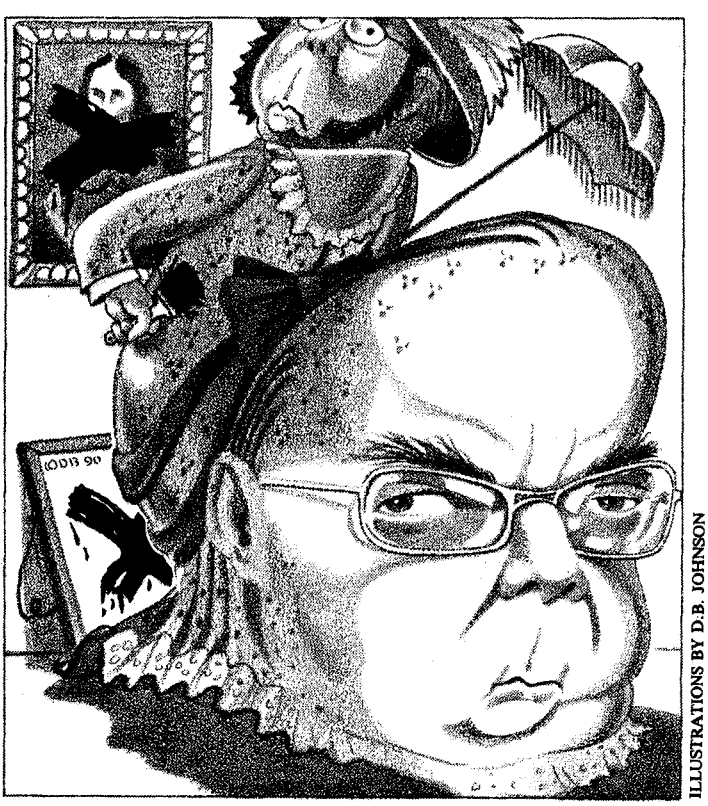
As it happens, Comstock died seventy-five years ago this past September, leaving behind a forty-year trail of banned books, jailed birth-control advocates and even suicides. It's an anniversary ironically marked by the impending Congressional debate on the National Endowment for the Arts. Comstock's Victorian dybbuk speaks through the born-again jowls of insurance-flack-turned-demagogue Jesse Helms, and the rise of Mad Anthony in the 1870s bears some astounding parallels to today's still-escalating debate over art and sexuality. Indeed, it was Comstock who first linked the two *bêtes noires* of today's morality crusaders: art and women's control of pregnancy. His career, along with the forces that brought him to power and those his antismut campaigns unleashed, suggests that there's far more to fear in the N.E.A. controversy than a cultural catfight between an eccentric right-wing senator and marginal avant-garde artists.

A few generations ago, Comstock would have required no introduction. As the nation's leading vice cop and self-styled protector of the virtue of youth, he was as familiar as Jerry Falwell and far more powerful. Comstock was the ultimate Connecticut Yankee, born in 1844 to a Congregationalist family whose roots in New Canaan went back 180 years. Virtually the only key to his early life and psychology is a diary he kept during two years of service in the Union Army during the Civil War—a stint in which his aggressive piety drove his comrades-in-arms to distraction. Its entries are awash with young Anthony's heartfelt struggles with temptation. This diary reveals Comstock as a true Puritan in his embrace of a very specific religious tradition and attitude toward cultural expression. In Florida he happened into a Catholic mass at midnight one Christmas Eve. "Soon became disgusted," he wrote. "Do not think it right to spend Sunday morn. in such manner. Seemed much like Theater." (That ancient Puritan loathing of the stage, which inspired the closing of theaters in post-Elizabethan England, is echoed today in the conspicuous presence of playwrights and performance artists like Karen Finley on the N.E.A.-Helms banned list.)

Mustered out of the Army in 1865, young Comstock married and went to work in a New York City dry-goods shop. He promptly found fellowship in the nascent Young Men's Christian Association, an organization founded by captains of industry who were concerned about declining morals—and more important, the declining birth rate—among their Yankee clerks in the face of hordes of new immigrants.

New York in the 1860s was a city where sex was plentiful, and so was contraception. Dime novels and postcard reproductions of nude paintings proliferated in bookstores and stationery shops. Anarchists and some feminists were beginning to preach free love and voluntary conception. Two decades after the invention of vulcanized rubber, condoms and "womb veils" (diaphragms) were cheap and readily available, advertised in newspapers along with contraceptive douches and vaginal sponges. Abortion, though technically illegal, was openly and widely practiced by midwives and some physicians, and it was also marketed in the papers with barely a wink. Abortion was so universally accepted that throughout the 1860s juries around the nation resisted new bans on the practice, handing down acquittal after acquittal.

In 1868, prodded by the Y.M.C.A. and its allies, Congress passed the first federal law aimed at halting lewd



ILLUSTRATIONS BY D.B. JOHNSON

Bruce Shapiro, a contributor to Building Bridges: The Emerging Grassroots Coalition of Labor and Community *(Monthly Review Press), is writing a book on political repression.*

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literature in the mails. But it was a measure with little enforcement power. That same year, Comstock later recalled, a male friend was "led astray and corrupted by disease," with Comstock laying the blame on a book dealer named Conroy. The angry young man led a police officer to Conroy's shop, purchased an "obscene" book and demanded the dealer's arrest. Aided by a sympathetic cop, Conroy slipped out the back. (Mad Anthony's arrest list is replete with names like Conroy and Finnegan: His career was as deeply etched with animus toward the Irish as Jesse Helms's is toward African-Americans. In 1880, Comstock traced the first pornography in the United States to an "Irish surgeon" named Haines. Two decades later, he called George Bernard Shaw "this Irish smut-dealer.")

Still obsessed, Comstock led a police officer back to Conroy's shop in 1872. This time he also brought a newspaper reporter, and he succeeded in getting the dealer arrested. The publicity so impressed the most conservative among the Y.M.C.A.'s wealthy backers that they broke from the main group to bankroll a new organization—the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, with 28-year-old Comstock as its relentless leader.

Comstock's attack on artists was inseparable from his brutal campaign against contraception, abortion and the women and men who provided those services.

The society immediately launched a two-pronged campaign against obscenity and "abortifacients and contraceptives." (There was little sentiment about the sanctity of conceived life: To Comstock and his followers, contraception and abortion were dangerous because they made debauchery more attractive and free of immediate consequences.) Between 1872 and 1874, by Comstock's own accounting, the group, and police spurred on by its campaign, seized 130,000 pounds of books and 60,300 "articles of rubber made for immoral purposes, and used by both sexes."

Comstock took a roadshow to Washington in January 1873, complete with a display of "obscene" materials, much like Jesse Helms's N.E.A. slide exhibit. He found a Congress desperate for distraction—distraction from a deepening national depression and from the dramatic Crédit Mobilier financial scandal, which involved Union Pacific Railroad bribes to prominent Capitol Hill Republicans. Overnight Comstock was a Washington celebrity; within a few weeks Congress passed his new stringently worded law prohibiting selling through the mails or advertising of obscene literature and items "for the prevention of conception."

One day after signing the law, President Ulysses Grant named Comstock a special postal inspector. It was an office he held until his death in 1915, giving official sanction to endless confiscations of books and art reproductions, to the arrests of booksellers and art dealers, to raids on art schools employing nude models. Within fifteen years, Comstock and the society netted more than 1,200 arrests. Even more important, they helped to establish the very new notion that sexual expression is un-American: "a foreign foe," in Comstock's oft-repeated phrase.

The dictionary recalls Comstock for that passionate devotion to lewd lit—for attacks on new authors like Shaw and old ones like Ovid; for his arrests of noted art dealers like Herman Knoedler, whose gallery nevertheless still flourishes; for his 1906 raid on the Art Students League in New York because of its use of nude models.

But Comstock's legacy of censorship is integrally linked to another witch-hunting campaign, one with profound contemporary echoes. It was through his personal intervention that Congress added that ban on items "for the prevention of conception" to the 1873 obscenity bill—a notion that had never before appeared in law. Seldom have five words held more import for the nation's women. The same phrase, or variations on it, appeared in more than twenty-two state "Comstock" laws that followed. Decades later, that phrase provided the legal pretext for the prosecution of Margaret Sanger, in which Comstock played a leading role. It was not until 1965, in the famous Supreme Court case *Griswold v. Connecticut*, which overturned the birth-control ban in Comstock's native state, that this legacy of Mad Anthony was pulled from the books.

When it came to birth control and abortion Comstock's fierce pursuit of "subversives" makes Joe McCarthy look timid. In February 1878, for instance, Comstock arrested Ann Lohman, known throughout Manhattan as Madame Restell. Lohman, a British-born midwife, was for decades New York's pre-eminent provider of abortion and birth control to women. Her practice was a magnet for the carriage trade, and she advertised her "preventive powders" at $5 a package in the popular press: "Is it not wise and virtuous to prevent evils to which we are subject by simple and healthy means within our control?" After a thirty-year career that had earned her both a Fifth Avenue town house and a prison term on Blackwells Island, Lohman was preparing to retire. To Comstock, her practice was an open challenge. Posing as an impoverished working man financially incapable of supporting another child, he convinced Lohman to sell him herbs that were supposed to induce miscarriage.

Lohman spent a month in the Tombs before rounding up $5,000 bail—her wealthy clients were afraid to be associated with her. The night before her scheduled trial, unwilling to name her clients and at age 67 desperate to avoid another jail term, Lohman cut her throat. Comstock's only comment on the woman he hounded to death: "A bloody ending to a bloody life."

That same year Comstock arrested a prominent New York physician, Dr. Sara Chase, for dispensing "female

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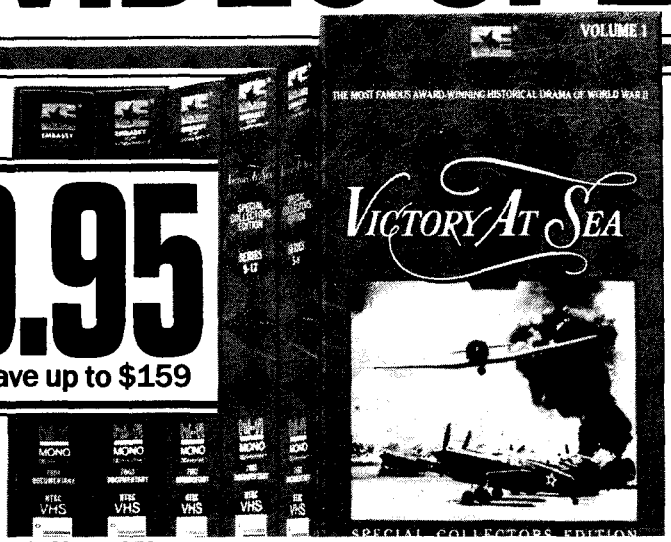

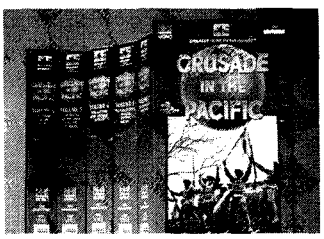

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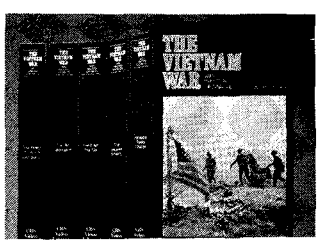

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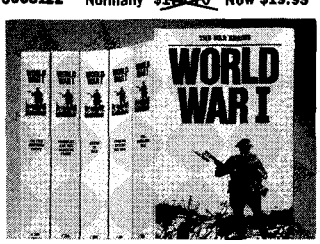

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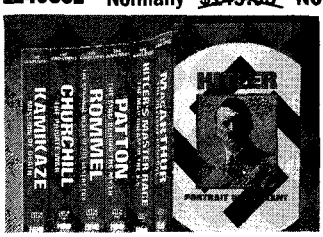

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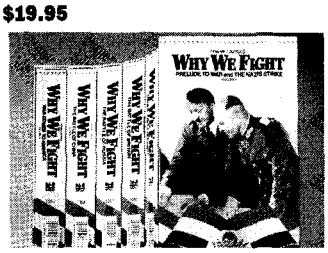

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syringes." Some of his evidence against her was gathered by responding to newspaper ads, some by sending undercover agents to snoop on her speeches. In 1878, a freethinking New York publisher named D.M. Bennett—whose anticlericalism and sexual liberalism made him a perennial target of Mad Anthony—documented numerous similar cases of entrapment, of book and art dealers who had obtained "obscene" materials at Comstock's request, only to be raided by him later. Bennett decried the growing legion of informers and undercover detectives newly employed by police departments to enforce the Comstock laws. Comstock and his agents, reported Bennett, often attended public meetings on sexual freedom incognito. Comstock himself acknowledged that he and his agents often persuaded his targets to sell "forbidden wares" that they might not otherwise provide in order to gather evidence against them.

From such accounts, it's clear that Comstock's antismut campaigns helped lay the groundwork for police Red Squads which developed in later decades. The link was at once political and practical: Behind the Comstock laws, established to monitor sex, stood the same goal of social control evident in the repression of the political left. Keep in mind that Comstock's heyday, the 1870s, coincided with the nation's worst depression up to that point, with bread riots and brutal repression of strikes. In the minds of Comstock's mercantile sponsors, sexual anarchism was indistinguishable from the political threat inspired by the Paris Commune—and both were linked to foreign-born lower classes. "There is a hydra-headed evil, malignant, unresting, yet, for the most part, invisible . . . making the youth of the land its victims," wrote Homer Sprague, president of the New England Society for the Suppression of Vice, in 1882. The hydra's nest was to be found among "the nondescript pamphlets of self-styled reformers who would reconstruct society on new foundations, making each community one great poultry yard, and so bringing back the golden age of monkeydom."

Comstock's attack on artists was inseparable from his brutal campaign against contraception, abortion and the women and men who provided those services. So too today. The right-wing attempt to police the N.E.A., with N.E.A. chief John Frohnmayer's opportunistic acquiescence, is the engine driving a wide-ranging attack on sexual privacy, reproductive rights and free speech.

Perhaps the most disturbing facet of the N.E.A. controversy is the extent to which it has been portrayed, even by critics of Helms, as simply a matter of artistic expression. It isn't. The handful of lesbian and gay artists so far denied funding are victims of a blacklisting movement whose net could easily spread as broadly as the anticommunist purges of the 1950s. It's a short and fully imaginable distance from the N.E.A.'s hypocritical "obscenity" pledge to Congressional hearings resonating with the question, "Are you now or have you ever been a homosexual?" (Such a question was actually posed by the F.B.I. to San Francisco photographer Jock Sturges last spring when he was raided by agents seeking his undeveloped photos of friends' children taken at a "clothing optional" beach; see Shapiro, "Art Cops," July 9.) It is just as conceivable that movie and television studios will demand oaths of sexual good-conduct from their stars, while the question "Do you now or have you ever performed abortions?" may be the standard for physicians admitted to practice in federally funded clinics.

Like Jesse Helms's porky pout and beady stare, Comstock's side whiskers, short legs and ubiquitous bow tie made him an easy target for cartoon caricature. Derision, though, did not diminish his impact. The period of Comstock's greatest influence was brief. Yet the laws he drafted, passed in a political whirlwind by legislators desperate to restore their sullied collective image, remained on the books for generations. It took a century of struggle by feminists and civil libertarians to free society from those repressive statutes enacted in a moment of hysteria.

In his book *The Sex Researchers*, the distinguished Edward Brecher warned more than twenty years ago of "a sexual Joe McCarthyism" looming on the horizon—"a ruthless repression of those who have convalesced too rapidly and too far" from the social disease known as Victorianism. The real target of Comstock's heirs, like that of Mad Anthony himself, is far broader than obscenity: They're after the whole notion of sexual privacy, and more specifically the sexuality of women and "deviants." Like the vice crusaders of the 1870s so obsessed with immigrants, today's Comstockians have their "foreign foe": homosexuals and AIDS. Today's Congress, like Capitol Hill in 1873, longs for relief from the savings and loan scandal, the deficit, the recession. The coming N.E.A. debate may seem the perfect diversion. It's not: Americans will live with the outcome for many years. □

WHITE HOUSE DIARY

Prez Fired Up Re: Kuwait Thing

DOUGLAS McGRATH

July 23: Souter and his mother in to meet with Prez. Souter v. quiet. Mother did most of the talking. She wanted to know if "that Sandra Day O'Connor girl" was married. When Prez said yes, she said, "Good. Single women is trouble. Further away they stays from Davy, the better. How about that daughter of yourn? The one what just got divorced? She ain't man-shopping is she?" Prez asked Souter for his views on abortion. Souter said, "If men'll just stay away from women in the first place, you never have to worry about abortion." Mother Souter patted him on the leg. "Good boy, Davy."

Dar says recession will start in next several weeks. *Post* poll said that most Americans already believe we're in a recession, even though it hasn't started yet. Trick now is to get them to believe it will last only a few weeks, so that by

Douglas McGrath, co-author of the novel Blockbuster, *is writing a screenplay for Hollywood Pictures.*

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AN AMERICAN JEWISH VIEW ON THE PERSIAN GULF CRISIS

As American Jews we share a special and grave concern for the survival and well-being of both Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. The crisis caused by the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and the massive American military response is a grave threat to both these populations. Palestinians in the Gulf states are caught between powerful combatants -- a situation Jews know all too well. Palestinians in the Occupied Territories risk being trapped in a war between Israel and Iraq fought in the West Bank and Jordan. Many Palestinians, frustrated at 23 years of Israeli military occupation, have greeted enthusiastically Saddam Hussein's defiance of Western military intervention. Meanwhile Israeli Jews are cast once more into a siege mentality, and faced with a real threat of devastating war. The prospects for Israeli-Palestinian peace grow more distant; the opportunities created by the intifada may be lost.

We must address the American role in precipitating this situation. For decades the United States, in its concern for "containment" and its desire to keep the world safe for cheap oil, has joined other industrialized nations, pouring armaments into the region to maintain and encourage authoritarian, royalist or right-wing governments. Many of these governments, along with the U.S. and the Soviet Union, supported Saddam Hussein as long as his war machine was turned on Iran or his own people. This crisis has shown us how dangerous and short-sighted that policy has been.

Jewish history teaches us that when our neighbors prosper, we prosper too, while a blow to our neighbors strikes us as well. Saddam Hussein cannot solve Iraq's problems through military adventures. Nor can Israel guarantee its people's security with missiles and gas masks while continuing to repress the Palestinians. Social needs in the United States are ignored while our leaders police the world. The way to real security has been shown by the P.L.O.'s recognition of Israel in November 1988 and by.the peace forces in Israel calling for an end to the occupation along with Palestinian independence.

The crisis demands a regional settlement addressing everyone's right to peace and justice. It is inconsistent for our government to subsidize the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories while spending billions to oppose the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. Iraq must withdraw from Kuwait; the United States must remove its troops from the Persian Gulf region; the United States must stop financing the Israeli occupation; Israel must withdraw from the Occupied Territories. We will do whatever we can to explain this to the American public for the sake of all our peoples.

Ronald Bleier, Dr. Jonathan Boyarin, Prof. Daniel Boyarin, Michael Cohen Esq., Hannah Davis, Prof. Stanley Diamond, Rabbi Susan Einbinder, Dr. Beverly Elkan, Prof. Marc H. Ellis, Prof. Gordon Fellman, Connie Hogarth, Prof. Sherna Berger Gluck, Marvin Gluck, Prof. Sherry Gorelick, Seth Grimes, Arthur Kamell, Howard Katz, Prof. Elana Levy, Int. Jewish Peace Union (IJPU) Seattle, Janet Marqusee, John Marqusee, Todd May, Howard N. Meyer Esq., David Millstein, Prof. Lawrence Moss, Prof. Marilyn Neimark, Julie Nalibov, Dr. Suzanne Ross, Dr. Michel Roublev, Ellen Sacks Esq., Elissa Sampson, Charles Scheiner, Dr. Eileen Storey, Prof. Joel Weisberg, Shatzi Weisberger, Esther Wolf, Dr. Paul Zilsel

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the time it actually starts, they'll think it's over.

Prez OK'd new low-interest loans to Iraq. They are replenishing their French weapons. Also gave them big grain deal way below market price; now they can afford the cluster bombs they've been wanting. Prez said it's been more than a month since they've gassed anyone and they deserve a reward.

Some bad news in Florida. A NASA weather satellite has mirror out of place. Sun struck the mirror, the mirror deflected the sunlight down to Sarasota and set the clown college on fire. With all the Hubble hubbub, Prez sent Q. down to Fla. to hush this up. Q., who is always hoping Prez will ask him to do something, was thrilled. Baker thinks it's because Q. will finally be near a college that would have taken him without his parents' help.

July 25: Big fight between Reilly, Sunu and Dar. Sunu and Dar want the Endangered Species Act rewritten so that a species may become extinct "if saving it would cause economic distress." Reilly was horrified, so Dar said, "Perhaps you might find the phrasing easier to swallow if it went more like this: 'If saving an animal threatened with extinction would cause economic distress to a region, that animal would be allowed to lapse.'" Sunu preferred "renewed," as in "The Department of the Interior has decided not to renew the spotted owl for next season." Reilly said he had never met two men like Sunu and Dar. Dar said, "Thank you." Sunu told Reilly to leave.

Souter and his mother met with the Senate today. I drove them over. Seemed to get along well enough but I'm worried about Prez and Sunu's decision to seek someone who has no published opinions on, well, anything. Souter told Biden he was most excited about the opportunity to affect grazing rights on a national level.

This A.M. had reports that there are 30,000 Iraqi troops on the Kuwait border. Prez called Mubarak. Mubarak called Saddam Hussein. Hussein said troops are on that border only until the sanitation people finish raking the desert. Prez v. relieved. Approved immediate sale of high-tech missile-guiding systems.

Congress racing toward recess. N.R.A. pushed v. hard for its bill that made it illegal not to own a handgun, but common sense prevailed and it was defeated by one vote.

Aug. 1: We've got a budget agreement with the Dems! Everyone has agreed that, after vacation, we'll really try to get a budget agreement.

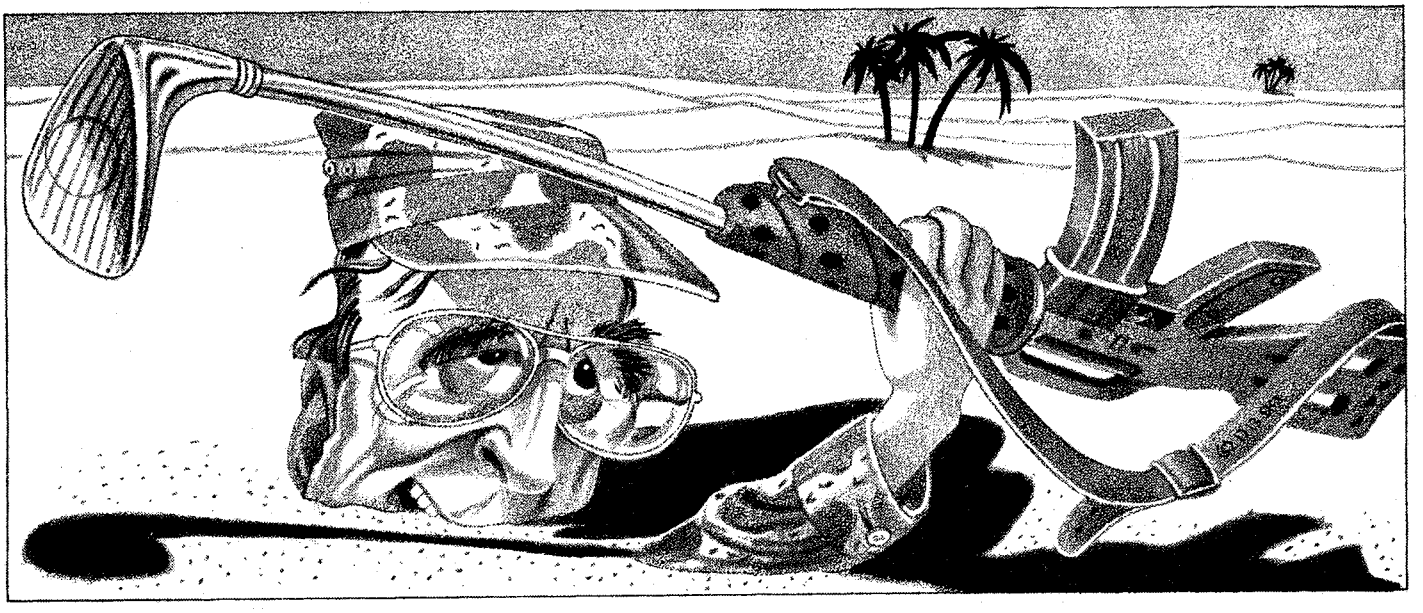
Prez had lunch w/Seidman. *V.* tricky. We've been trying to push Seidman out for months. Now Seidman is deciding whether to launch a $50 million lawsuit against Neil Bush. So now everyone is ridiculously nice to him. Prez gingerly asked when Seidie might resign: "And hey! Not because you're not doing a super job up there, Seidwinder, but because there's a Cabinet position in here—about to open up over there—that you'd be A-Number 1 for. I can't tell you what it is, but it rhymes with Mecretary of State." Unfortunately, Seidie says he can't leave until "my work is done." Everyone agrees Seidie will have to be eliminated. Sunu is going to call him, pretend he's his doctor, and tell him he has cancer and should spend his remaining time with his family.

(*11:50 P.M.*) Iraq has invaded Kuwait. Prez furious: "OK. They want to test me, those Arabs out there, over there in Arabia, let 'em test me. Bring on the paper and the number 2's! It's pit bull time!" Called Tariq Aziz, who said, "Don't think of it as an invasion. Think of it as a very fast real estate transaction." Prez told Aziz, "Zuider Zeezer, there can only be one response to this." Will go to Colorado tomorrow to see Thatcher and find out what it is. In the meantime, will still send them cluster bombs, only now will send by book rate.

One good thing. I think we just saved the B-2.

Aug. 2: Thatch tells Prez that Hussein "won't stop." If we don't act, he will take Saudi Arabia. Prez ready to do what needs to be done.

On flight back, the papers reported that "Saddam" means "one who confronts." Prez furious with media for not reporting what *his* name means. "Media. Liberals. Out to knock me down." He said, "Let's look my name up and leak it to the press." Unfortunately, "George" means "farmer." Sunu said, "Too bad it doesn't mean 'farmers'



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lobby.' *That's* a force to be reckoned with." Prez said, "Hey! I've got two middle names in there. Let's Danny Webster those." "Walker" didn't help, as no one felt Hussein would be afraid of confronting a walking farmer. But "Herbert" had a possibility: "bert" only means bright, but "Her" means "army." Pay dirt! Prez ecstatic. "All right. Let's get our CIA man up there in Iraq to get a message in there to Hussein that the first syllable of one of my middle names means 'army.' The Hooser may think twice-a-roni about invading Saudi Arabia when that news comes across his desk."

Aug. 5: Iraq hasn't withdrawn its troops, despite promises. Here was Hoose's excuse: "We said we would withdraw—but not to *Iraq*! That would be *retreating*. No, no. We said we would withdraw. And we kept our word. We withdrew to the Saudi border."

Prez furious. "I want him out of Kuwait. Period. Non-negotiable. One-sided coin. He will give the Kiwis their country back. Get on the phone and tell him that I Patrick Henryed: 'Give the Kiwis Liberace or give them death!'"

One drawback of going to war, and it's a big one: Prez will have to give a big speech to the nation. Sunu told me to get Lip Coach and Hand Trainer ASAP.

Aug. 7: Prez reviewed speech with Sunu and me. He objects to the word "war." He explained: "War makes people think of sacrifice. If people had wanted sacrifice, they would've elected a Democrat." Told Sunu to think of another word. Sunu told me to think of another word.

Prez worked all morning with Lip Coach, who had him do his antipursing exercises; then the Hand Trainer came in. Teet has told us that Prez's hand movements make the country nervous. Study groups report that if the sound is turned off during a speech of the Prez's, more than 65 percent of those polled think he is discussing a hernia problem. Hand Trainer worked with him for 3 hours, at the end of which he said, "He is beyond help." So, to keep the hands still during the speech, Prez will wear a special jacket with lead sleeves.

Aug. 8: What we've all been fearing has happened: Iraq has taken hostages. We will not be allowed to refer to them as hostages as Teet says the word people most often think of after "hostage" is "crisis." Also, he said, "If you call them hostages, we'll just have to see them on TV." Sunu told me to think of another word. I suggested "mandatory guests." Sunu liked it. They are also using the term I came up with so Prez doesn't have to say "war." He will say "military aerobics."

Aug. 10: Dar told Prez that recession is imminent. No one minds this, since we can now blame it on Hussein. Charlie Black, the fellow filling Atwa's job, suggested calling it "the Hussession." Black's going to work out fine. Maybe he can help me with some of this renaming I've got to do. Sunu told me today to think of another word for blockade.

Prez left for vacation. Initially, staff was split on wisdom of this, so we used the infallible decision-enhancing process Deaver developed for Reagan: We played "What Would Carter Do?" Agreeing that Carter would've picked, as Prez put it, "one of those malaisey sacrifice things he was so big on," we chose vacation at once. Prez explained to press, "The American people don't want to see me held as a mandatory guest in my own White House here."

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Kennebunkport

Aug. 13: The Vacation is a fiasco. It rains every day, but Prez is worried that if he stays inside press will say he's being held hostage by the rain. Also, everyone agrees that Carter would have stayed inside. So all of us, every day, are out there golfing and playing tennis and riding in that stupid boat. Everyone has the flu. It's almost worth it, though, to see how wet the press is.

This morning, Mrs. B. wouldn't let the Prez go out. Prez didn't feel like working, so we played his favorite indoor game: Someone calls out a world leader and we see how fast the Prez can dial his number.

Public reaction to vacation is not good. Naturally, I now have to come up with another word for vacation. (I'm wondering: something maybe with "vocation"?)

Still having trouble with Seidie. Sunu's trick of calling and pretending to be Seidie's doctor didn't work. Seidie's doctor is a woman. If it keeps raining, we may have him up here and hope he gets the flu.

Aug. 14: Prez in D.C. to address Pentagon and troops at huge rally. He said, "The mandatory American guests in Iraq are being used in a way that may bring the world to the brink of military aerobics. Therefore, to see that no weapons or food gets into Iraq, the United States and its allies are placing a naval turtleneck around the gulf. I will keep a close eye on this from my home in Maine, where I am prudently vovacating."

He then explained the diplomatic steps he'd taken: "I have sent Secretary Baker to Paris and Ambassador Pickering to the UN. And because our troops may be away from home for a long time, today I will ask William Seidman to go to the front line for several weeks and help our troops set up a system for managing their money."

Aug. 18: Horrifying development in Middle East. In an effort to discourage us from attacking Iraq, Hussein says he will strap hostages onto the backs of Iraqi soldiers. Prez, trying not to be held hostage by these developments, announced he will take a night course and learn the violin.

On the good side, the French are going to commit troops. Baker did it. He called and told them that if there was one thing America didn't want them to do, one thing no one was doing, it was send troops.

Aug. 22: Terrible panic this A.M. Scow woke Prez with satellite pictures that showed Hussein had invaded Saudi Arabia. Prez: "This is it! I'm being tested by fire! Always said I haven't been! Now I am! Told that Sam. Told old Diane. Never been tested. Now it's here, those old flames are in here, licking at the Bush legs! Gotta put it out!" Luckily, before we did anything, we found out the mirror on the satellite was malfunctioning. It wasn't the Saudi border. It was traffic at the Mexican border.

Aug. 26: De Cuéllar to go to Jordan and negotiate. Everyone here v. relieved. There's nothing like a quiet calm with the hope of peace springing in the hearts of men and women around the world to give us time to rush our troops into place.

Plan for now is wait for troops to get in place, wait for provocation, then strike like thunder. Everyone feels we won't have to stage a provocation—after all, we're in the Middle East. Tons of US troops will be sent. This will prob. happen before the election, which is perfect. It will obliterate our biggest problem right now, the S&L crisis, which Teet says more and more people are blaming us for. There is no better cure for a domestic crisis than an international one.

Very sweet scene late this P.M. in Prez's study. Joint Chiefs requested a meeting. At first, they couldn't speak. Colin Powell was wringing his hands and biting his lip. He finally looked up and said, "We've been so worried that you were going to waste the peace dividend. But now . . . " He began to cry. "Well, thank you! Thank you so much! This is the best present we could ever get!" They were all crying, coming up to the Prez and shaking his hand. General Sharp bent down and kissed the tail of the Prez's golf shirt.

I didn't realize how hard the end of the cold war had been on them. □

LETTER FROM EUROPE

Creeping Capitalism

DANIEL SINGER

Europe's landscape is changing—dramatically in its Eastern half, which is groping toward capitalism, and less spectacularly in the Western part, which is on the road to a single market. The following notes on recent transformations suggest that the two trends are not unconnected.

Big if Not Beautiful. The announcement on July 30 of the long-heralded takeover of International Computers, Britain's champion in this field, by Fujitsu, the big Japanese specialist, created quite a stir in Europe. It was a reminder that in several fields European corporations cannot compete with the giants of the international marketplace. But Fujitsu's move was taken as a challenge not to Europe's big producers of mainframe computers—the German Siemens, the French Groupe Bull and the Italian Olivetti—but to I.B.M., the American giant.

There is no complaint about the invasion of American capital for the simple reason that for some time now money has been flowing across the Atlantic in the opposite direction. The only novelty, according to a recently published study, is that in the past few years French companies, particularly state-owned ones, were the leaders in this trans-Atlantic transfer of capital. While new, this development should not be surprising. In the earlier phase of the Industrial Revolution business concentration had proceeded much further in Britain and Germany. It is now the turn of French, and also Italian, corporations to catch up, and the

Daniel Singer is The Nation*'s Europe correspondent.*

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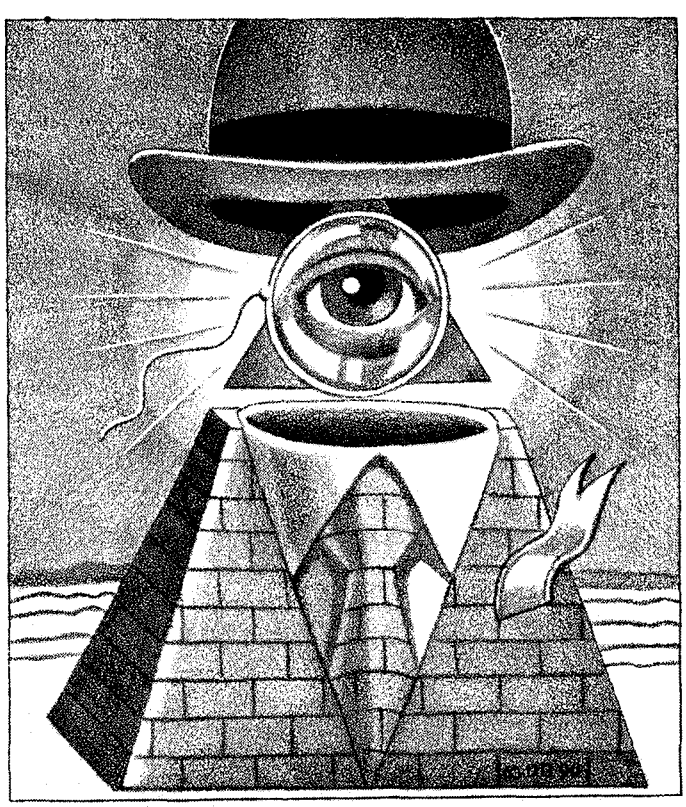
state is helping them to reach the size needed for international competition.

We are approaching the final stage of capitalist concentration on the international scale, with giants swallowing giants. The tales about capitalism with companies on a human scale were just tales. Small may be beautiful but our god, Mammon, is on the side of the big battalions.

East for South? Western Europe's "economic miracle" after the last war was partly due to the mass migration of impoverished workers ready to fill less-rewarding jobs. In the mid-1970s, the economic crisis put an end to this movement and in some countries even led to a reversal. But globally, immigrant workers had come to stay and, indeed, judging by the latest report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the movement has now resumed to some extent, notably because of a growing demand for labor in the service sector.

The immigrants no longer come from the same places. The Italians, the Spaniards and the Portuguese are not emigrating in such large numbers as in the past. Besides, since their countries are now members of the European Economic Community, they, and the Greeks as well, can legally seek jobs throughout the Common Market. The new outsiders are the Turks and, above all, the North Africans. The threat of a Muslim "invasion" from the Maghreb, which has been raised by right-wing groups, has been inflated by simply projecting into the future huge fertility rates from the past. Those forecasts must be revised downward since the Algerian birthrate is dropping dramatically, following the pattern set in Tunisia and Morocco. It is doubtful whether even the fundamentalists can reverse this trend.

Whatever the future, at present the combination of a young population and an insufficient supply of jobs spells out a dramatic surplus of labor. The rate of emigration from North Africa would be even greater if unemployment in Western Europe were not still fairly high. Soon the North Africans may also be hindered by Eastern European competition. Last year more than 700,000 Germans immigrated into the Common Market, half of them ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe and the other half coming from East Germany.



Admittedly, with Germany united, the latter will not figure in next year's immigration statistics. But they will keep on migrating. Capitalism's first blessing from Central and Eastern Europe has been the gift of unemployment. In Poland it has now reached 750,000 and is expected to double by the end of the year. In East Germany it is rising even faster. If this trend continues and spreads throughout Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union, and the jobless are permitted to leave, the exodus could reach gigantic proportions, limited only by Western immigration barriers. For all sorts of reasons, including racist ones, the European Community is likely to welcome these migrants more than their counterparts from Africa. The South now has to compete with the East not only as an outlet for Western capital but also as a source of labor.

Vultures Over Culture. Sometimes money crosses frontiers to take part in a cultural venture. Thus Einaudi, the prestigious Italian publisher, participated in July in an operation designed to rescue its French equivalent, Gallimard. Founded in 1911 under the auspices of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, the house of Gallimard has published Gide and Proust, Malraux and Breton, Aragon and Sartre. As the publisher of classics, of important foreign authors and of social science books, Gallimard, though medium in size, is second to none in prestige. But at the beginning of this year the third generation of owners had a falling out and the independence of the house was seriously threatened. Since the official heir, Antoine Gallimard, has apparently won, he keeps 33.5 percent of the shares and thus can veto any decisions. Together with his friends and such influential partners as Einaudi (10 percent) or Havas, the French advertising agency (7 percent), he has an absolute majority. Finally, he has obtained legal guarantees preventing the transfer of shares. Gallimard thus looks safe from conglomerate raiders for a few years.

Nevertheless, the firm has at least two reasons to worry. One of them it shares with other French publishers. A study just released by the French Statistical Office explains why the spread of education is not coupled with a corresponding expansion of readers. The reason is that people in the various social groups tend to read less than they used to. Most notably, students and people with a secondary education read less than their equivalents did twenty years ago. The second warning, the Italian precedent, is more directly pertinent. The Einaudi of the rescue operation is not the Einaudi of old, which, in every respect, was a match for Gallimard. The old family house was taken over in 1988 by an association bringing together Electa, a big producer of art books, and Mondadori, the major Italian publisher not only of books but also of periodicals, including the weeklies

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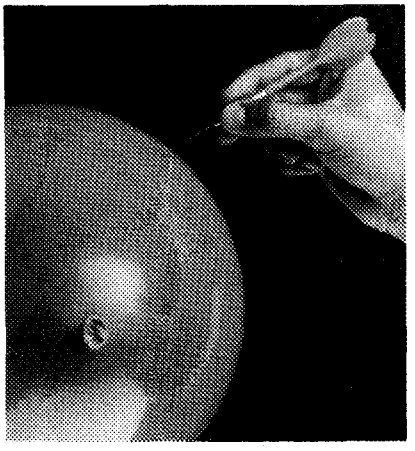

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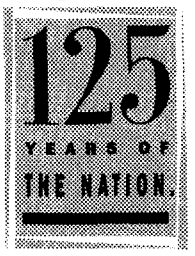

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HOKIS

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Panorama and *Espresso* and the successful daily *La Repubblica.* As to the ownership of Mondadori itself, the battle for its control was a real-life *Dallas*, a saga of power, passion and money that has fascinated Italians for the past year.

In one corner you had the *ingegnere* ("engineer"), Carlo de Benedetti, whose European empire is built around his Olivetti base. In the other, you had *sua emittenza* ("his broadcasting highness"), Silvio Berlusconi, king of commercial television and owner of three Italian channels. In the middle stood the original owner, the Formenton family, which at first was intimately linked with de Benedetti. But part of the family switched to the other side and there followed an intricate legal battle which ended, if such feuds ever do, last June, with the victory of the *ingegnere.*

Most press lords in Italy are industrial tycoons such as the Agnelli family of Fiat. Berlusconi, like the Frenchman Robert Hersant, belongs to the new breed of media magnates who tend to expand beyond national frontiers. When one objects to both kinds of vulture that increasingly have come to dominate European culture, the standard reply is that such moguls are needed to stand up to the mighty Americans. But the problem is not keeping out Twain, Faulkner or Doctorow. The problem is to resist American trash, and it is small consolation if this commercial rubbish acquires European citizenship.

Grazhdanin Kane. In 1986 Bertelsmann A.G. had to pay a fortune to purchase Doubleday, the U.S. publishing house. On July 30 it spent a mere $2.14 million to acquire a controlling interest in *Nebszabadzag*, Hungary's biggest daily and not so long ago the mouthpiece of that country's Communist Party. Such are the ironies of history, and Bertelsmann is no pioneer. In Budapest it follows in the footsteps of Axel Springer, Robert Maxwell and Rupert Murdoch. Indeed, citizens Kane and Co., our Western gang of plunderers, are now scanning Eastern Europe. The prices are dirt cheap, yet they are looking less for immediate profit than for long-term domination. For the moment they have moved strongly only into newspapers and publishing, but, as deregulation proceeds, they will be spreading into radio and television. And they are already dreaming of the huge Soviet market.

Nobody is nostalgic for pre-*glasnost Pravda*, censorship, Zhdanov and "socialist realism" (which had no connection with either socialism or realism). Yet anyone who visited Eastern Europe knows that there was another side to this story: that newspapers, books and other publications were cheap, that the general public could afford tickets for the theater, that opera was not for the happy few. Those advantages are being rapidly torn apart by the logic of the capitalist gospel. The freedom we are bringing to Eastern Europe in this domain is the subtle slavery of commercial culture.

To be accurate, we are exporting our system at its worst, minus the cushions provided by prosperity, minus the fat of the foundations. Unless the new regimes find a third way between neo-Stalinism and capitalism, unless they manage to combine new freedoms with some of their former advantages, these countries will find themselves in the worst of possible worlds, linking the most modern means for exploiting culture with the savagery of the capitalism of another age. They will have both *Dallasty* and primitive accumulation.

Privileged of All Lands Unite. The Soviet Union does not yet have a capitalist class, but it already has its spokespersons. A good illustration is provided by the lengthy dialogue, published in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* on July 18, between its editor, Fyodor Burlatski, an establishment figure since Khrushchev's days, and the economist Nikolai Shmelev, whose famous adage "everything that is efficient is moral" turned him into the darling of the *priviligentsia.* The two compères talk at length about what is to come, giving "counsels to the presidential council," but their real passion is provoked by the prospect of a progressive income tax.

As long as incomes were centrally determined in the Soviet Union, taxing them served little purpose, and the tax for the highest income bracket amounted to 13 percent. Now that wages and salaries are to be locally determined and highly differentiated, Mikhail Gorbachev's advisers have proposed a more steeply progressive income tax, at least by Soviet standards. For the highest bracket, for people earning 3,000 rubles a month—more than twelve times the average salary—the tax will be in the region of 35 percent. This drives citizen Burlatski mad.

He begins by attacking smart alecks who point out that in the West income tax is even more progressive; they forget that "for an article a writer gets 10-20 times as much and the filmmaker or footballer—100 to 200 times." He clearly prefers to be compared with Steven Spielberg or Joe Montana than with the average Soviet wage earner. He even asks wittily whether the purpose of the whole operation is, à la Plato, "to chase poets and musicians out of the new, market-regulated socialist paradise." Burlatski then gets serious. Even Stalin, he argues, while killing intellectuals, paid the survivors well so as to get them to produce good tanks and planes, good literature and music. Even Khrushchev, while quarreling with the intelligentsia, kept their remuneration in line with prices. *Et tu*, Gorbachev? Both our men are cursing his advisers, who are leading him astray and who invent "laws for the stifling of culture."

Such a plea against progressive taxation could be published in *Fortune* or *Forbes.* On second thought, it probably wouldn't. Our panegyrists for the acquisitive society require greater sophistication, even if they may lack the zeal of these aspiring nouveaux riches. □

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Say No To War
Say Yes To The U.N.

Reprinted below is an article that appeared in *The New York Times* Op Ed page on Thursday August 23,1990

If My Marine Son Is Killed . . .

By Alex Molnar

MILWAUKEE

Dear President Bush:

I kissed my son goodbye today. He is a 21-year-old marine. You have ordered him to Saudi Arabia.

The letter telling us he was going arrived at our vacation cottage in northern Wisconsin by Express Mail on Aug. 13. We left immediately for North Carolina to be with him. Our vacation was over.

Some commentators say you are continuing your own vacation to avoid appearing trapped in the White House, as President Carter was during the Iran hostage crisis. Perhaps that is your reason. However, as I sat in my motel room watching you on television, looking through my son's hastily written last will and testament and listening to military equipment rumble past, you seemed to me to be both callous and ridiculous chasing golf balls and zipping around in your boat in Kennebunkport.

While visiting my son I had a chance to see him pack his chemical weapons suit and try on his body armor. I don't know if you've ever had this experience, Mr. President. I hope you never will.

I also met many of my son's fellow soldiers. They are fine young men. A number told me that they were from poor families. They joined the Marines as a way of earning enough money to go to college.

None of the young men I met are likely to be invited to serve on the board of directors of a savings and loan association, as your son Neil was. And none of them have parents well enough connected to call or write a general to insure that their child stays out of harm's way, as Vice President Quayle's parents did for him during the Vietnam War.

I read in today's Raleigh News and Observer that, like you, Vice President Quayle and Secretary of State Baker are on vacation. Meanwhile, Defense Secretary Cheney is in the Persian Gulf. I think this symbolizes a Government that no longer has a non-military foreign policy vision, one that uses the military to conceal the fraud that American diplomacy has become.

Yes, you have proved a relatively adept tactician in the last three weeks. But if American diplomacy hadn't been on vacation for the better part of a decade, we wouldn't be in the spot we are today.

> . . . I won't forgive you, Mr. Bush.

Where were you, Mr. President, when Iraq was killing its own people with poison gas? Why, until the recent crisis, was it business as usual with Saddam Hussein, the man you now call a Hitler?

You were elected Vice President in 1980 on the strength of the promise of a better life for Americans, in a world where the U.S. would once again "stand tall." The Reagan-Bush Administration rolled into Washington talking about the magic of a "free market" in oil. You diluted gas mileage requirements for cars and dismantled Federal energy policy. And now you have ordered my son to the Middle East. For what? Cheap gas?

Is the American "way of life" that you say my son is risking his life for the continued "right" of Americans to consume 25 to 30 percent of the world's oil? The "free market" to which you are so fervently devoted has a very high price tag, at least for parents like me and young men and women like my son.

Now that we face the prospect of war I intend to support my son and his fellow soldiers by doing everything I can to oppose any offensive American military action in the Persian Gulf. The troops I met deserve far better than the politicians and policies that hold them hostage.

As my wife and I sat in a little cafe outside our son's base last week, trying to eat, fighting back tears, a young marine struck up a conversation with us. As we parted he wished us well and said, "May God forgive us for what we are about to do."

President Bush, the policies you have advocated for the last decade have set the stage for military conflict in the Middle East. Your response to the Iraqi conquest of Kuwait has set in motion events that increasingly will pressure you to use our troops not to defend Saudi Arabia but to attack Iraq. And I'm afraid that, as that pressure mounts, you will wager my son's life in a gamble to save your political future.

In the past you have demonstrated no enduring commitment to any principle other than the advancement of your political career. This makes me doubt that you have either the courage or the character to meet the challenge of finding a diplomatic solution to this crisis. If, as I expect, you eventually order American soldiers to attack Iraq, then it is God who will have to forgive you. I will not. □

Alex Molnar is professor of education at the University of Wisconsin, in Milwaukee.

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

Arts and the State

PAUL MATTICK JR.

Visiting the exhibition of Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston a month ago, it was hard at first to see what all the fuss was about. The controversy that has dogged the show since its organization by the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia certainly made itself felt in the huge numbers of visitors (tickets sold out well in advance) and in the aura of decorous excitement that enveloped those who managed to get in. Most of the pictures, however, were unexciting. With the exception of a handful of striking images from the artist's last years, we saw celebrity portraits shot in 1940s fashion style, arty flowers, naked black men in a venerable art-nude tradition. In a distinct area, however, reached only by waiting in a patient line of cultured scopophiles, were the pictures which more than the others had called down upon the National Endowment for the Arts, partial funder of the Philadelphia I.C.A., the wrath of America's self-appointed guardians of morality.

There were more flowers, more naked black men and a set of s&m photos that was undeniably gripping. Here the subject matter overcame Mapplethorpe's tendency to artiness and commercial finish in a set of documents with the power of the once dark and hidden brought to light. Here are some things some people like to do, they say; this is part of our world; you can look or not, but now you know they exist, whatever you think of them. In an age saturated with sexual imagery of all kinds, these pictures were perhaps not as disturbing as they might have been to more innocent eyes. At any rate, the visiting public was not so horrified as to fail to crowd the museum store to purchase bookfuls of Mapplethorpe's pictures (along with black nude-emblazoned T-shirts, floral porcelain plates and bumper stickers proclaiming support for freedom of the arts). Nonetheless, these photographs, in the company of a few other pictures and performances, have evoked a storm of Congressional and popular indignation that now threatens to sweep away the N.E.A. itself. This, in turn, has given rise to attempts to defend the current mode of state patronage of the arts.

It is difficult to speak of real controversy in this area, as the two discourses at work are to a great degree at cross-purposes. That of the naysaying politicians tends toward expressions of traditional American anti-intellectualism, portraying state arts funding as the use, basically for the gratification of a degenerate Eastern elite, of money better spent on local pork barrels and military projects. Art, in this view, has a natural affinity with sex, subversion and fraudulence. On the other hand, the statements of opposition to censorship and calls for arts funding by artists, dealers, other art professionals and liberal politicians take as given the social value of the arts, their consequent claim on the public purse and (with some disagreement) the current mode of distribution of the goodies. Without being in favor of either censorship or the diversion of yet more money to produce new bombers and missiles, one may step back and attempt to rethink the question.

Lacking a feudal heritage, a tradition of princely magnificence such as that which stands behind state cultural policy in European countries, the United States has no long history of governmental patronage of the arts. Under American law, corporations themselves were forbidden to engage in philanthropy, including support of the arts, until 1935. Washington was supposed, in this most purely capitalist of all nations, to spend only the minimum needed to control labor and defend business's national interests. Theater, including opera, functioned in the nineteenth century as a commercial enterprise across the country, and the visual arts were for the most part produced for private purchase. When growing economic power stimulated the mercantile and industrial upper classes of the later nineteenth century to call for the establishment of museums, symphony orchestras and other cultural institutions, they had to put up the money themselves. Thus, while the revolutionary regime in France, for example, took over the King's palace and its contents to create the Musée du Louvre for the nation, the United States did not have a National Gallery in Washington until Andrew Mellon gave his personal collection to the country and started building a structure to house it in 1938.

The arts began to attract more public attention with the start of the twentieth century, as can be seen in the national publicity gained by the Armory Show, which introduced European modernism to the United States in 1913. Whereas art and all those things called "culture" in general had earlier been largely identified with the European upper class, Regionalism, given national exposure by a *Time* cover story in 1934, claimed to be a uniquely American style. At the time of the New Deal, a few farsighted individuals conceived the idea of government aid to the arts as part of the general federal effort to combat the Depression. Two programs for the employment of artists, one run out of the Treasury Department and a much larger one as part of the Works Progress Administration, represented the national government's first entry into patronage (aside from the commissioning of official buildings, statuary and paintings). In the view of the organizers of these projects, their long-term rationale was support for the arts as a fundamental part of American life; but they could be realized, in the face of much opposition from Congress (and professional artists' associations, true to the principles of free enterprise), only as relief programs, employing otherwise starving (and potentially subversive) artists and preserving their productive skills during the emergency. Both programs died, after a period of reduction, with America's entry into the war.

Institutional concern with the arts developed markedly with the U.S. rise to world supremacy after the war. The war reversed the normal flow of American artists to Europe, bringing refugee artists to New York and California and thus stimulating artistic life, at least on the edges of North America. More important, its segue into the cold war joined to the growing desire of the American upper class to play social roles equal to its expanded global importance a new use for American modern art as a symbol of the advantages of a free society. New York abstraction, still unappreciated by any sizable public, was not only promoted by the mass media that had once publicized Regionalism but was shipped around the world, along with jazz music and indus-

Paul Mattick Jr. teaches philosophy at Adelphi University.

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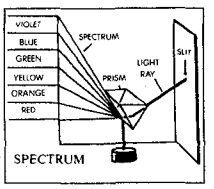

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trial design, by government bodies like the United States Information Agency and by the Rockefeller-dominated Museum of Modern Art. In modern art, it seemed, America was now number one; while still incomprehensible (as critic Max Kozloff once observed), art that celebrated the autonomy of the creative individual no longer seemed so subversive. In the realm of classical music, Van Cliburn's victory in a piano competition in Moscow in 1958 was an event of political as well as cultural importance.

More fundamentally, beyond issues of international political prestige and the aristocratic pretensions of the very rich, the idea was gaining ground among America's elite—particularly in the Northeast but in a city like Chicago as well—that art is a Good Thing, a glamorous thing, even (more recently) a fun thing. This attitude rapidly trickled down to the middle class, whose self-assertion as leading citizens of an affluent and powerful nation was expressed in a new attachment to culture. As interest in art spread throughout the country, the 1950s saw galleries in department stores, rising museum and concert attendance and the commercial distribution of classical LPs and inexpensive reproductions of famous paintings. Studio training and art history departments proliferated in the universities. A handful of corporate executives, in alliance with cultural entrepreneurs like Mortimer Adler and R.M. Hutchins, discovered that culture, whether classic or modern, could be both marketed and used as a marketing medium.

In part this reflected the changing nature of the business class; while fewer than 50 percent of top executives had some college education in 1900, 76 percent did by 1950. The postwar rise of the professional manager helped break down the traditional barrier between the worlds of business and culture, affecting the self-image of American society as a whole. To this was joined—with the growth of academia, research institutions and all levels of government—the emergence of the new professional-intellectual stratum, connected in spirit to the power elite in a way unknown to the alienated intelligentsia of yesteryear. In 1952 the editors of *Partisan Review* introduced a symposium on "Our Country and Our Culture" with the observation that just a decade earlier, "America was commonly thought to be hostile to art and culture. Since then, however, the tide has begun to turn. . . . Europe . . . no longer assures that rich experience of culture which inspired and justified a criticism of American life. . . . [N]ow America has become the protector of Western civilization."

Thus politics, business and culture joined hands. Art's growing value as an area of investment and domestic public relations could only be reinforced by its emergence as a marker of international prestige. The Kennedys' Camelot was a watershed, with its transformation of the Europhilia typical of the American elite into the representation of the White House as a world cultural center. Kennedy counselor Arthur Schlesinger Jr. put it this way, in arguing for a government arts policy: "We will win world understanding of our policy and purposes not through the force of our arms or the array of our wealth but through the splendor of our ideals."

The N.E.A. reflects the state's responsibility for aspects of the good life not taken care of by market forces.

Such efforts both led to and were enormously enhanced by the founding of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965 and its rapid development thereafter. While it represented the fulfillment of ideas bruited about various levels of government since the Eisenhower days, the N.E.A. was realized as an accompaniment to Lyndon Johnson's Great Society; like that program as a whole (and like the W.P.A.), it reflected the principle of the state's responsibility for those aspects of the good life not automatically taken care of by market forces. It should not be thought that it was established without opposition (as of course no Great Society program was); in fact, the N.E.A. achieved legislative reality only as a unit of a National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities, of which the National Endowment for the Humanities was the more respectable half. In addition, the arts were carefully defined to include the productions of the culture industry—movies, radio, fashion and industrial design—along with the traditional "high" arts. The Endowment not only survived numerous challenges to legitimacy but saw its budget rise between 1969 and 1977 from $8 million to more than $82 million, and by 1990 to $171 million. This, moreover, is only a portion of total arts spending, which includes sums directed, for some examples, to museum development, to the Smithsonian Institution and to projects under the aegis of the National Park System. In addition, the big push to culture given by Congress since the mid-1960s included changes in tax laws—in recent years to a certain extent undone—encouraging donations of art and money to museums and other institutions.

One must not exaggerate: The sums spent on its arts agency by the American government have always been derisorily small, both relative to other government programs and in comparison with the spending of other industrialized capitalist nations. West Germany, the world leader, spent about $73 per inhabitant on the arts last year; the Netherlands spent $33, and even Margaret Thatcher's Britain laid out $12; the United States indulged its culture-mongers with a measly 71 cents per capita. This amounted to less than 0.1 percent of the federal budget (the Smithsonian alone receives a larger appropriation than the N.E.A., as does the Pentagon's military band program, budgeted in 1989 at $193 million). Even this, however, has seemed too much to many conservative politicians, and the current effort to eliminate or restrict the N.E.A. must be seen as one more protest by conservative forces against a relatively novel effort with which they have never been happy.

Opposition has typically focused, throughout the short history of government arts funding, on moral and political issues as well as on the sacred character of the taxpayer's dollar. W.P.A. artists were attacked for painting nudes, and a photographic registry of artists' models was held up in Congress as an example of the sort of filth that visual artists go in for (along with political imagery of the Popular Front variety). In 1940 Senator Robert Reynolds from North Carolina (which thirty years later would send forth the scourge of the N.E.A., Jesse Helms) urged Congress to refuse to fund the federal theater project, with its "unsavory collection of communistic, un-American doctrines, its assortment of insidious and vicious ideologies" and "putrid plays."

The N.E.A. was carefully designed to avoid many of the controversies that had swirled around the W.P.A. The nongovernmental panel system of peer review in awarding grants both tied the endowment to arts institutions and shielded it from

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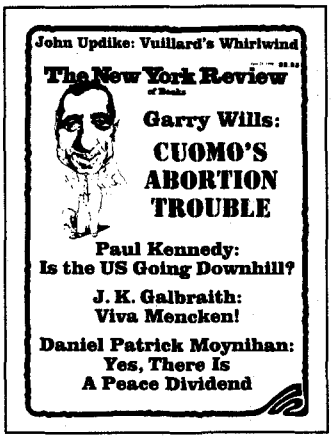

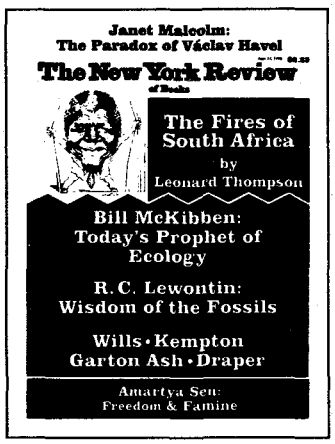

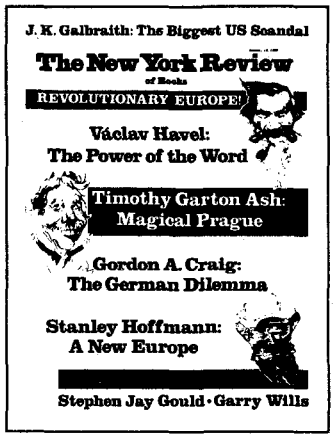

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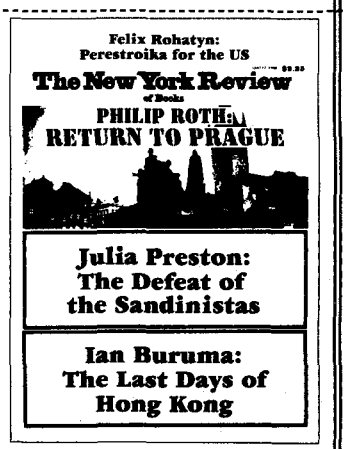

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	30	**MEXICAN LITERATURE FESTIVAL I : Homero Aridjis, Marco Antonio Montes de Oca**
October	8	**MEXICAN LITERATURE FESTIVAL II : Octavio Paz**
	15	**MEXICAN LITERATURE FESTIVAL III: Elena Poniatowska** and poet **Jose Emilio Pacheco**
	22	**Josephine Jacobsen** and **Anne Winters**
	29	**John Edgar Wideman** and **Terry McMillan**
November	5	**Claire Bloom:** An Evening of Poetry and Music
	12	**GEOGRAPHIES I: Barry Lopez** reads from his work
	19	**Reynolds Price** reads from his work
	26	**Don DeLillo** and **Paul Auster**
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	21	**August Wilson**
	28	**WRITERS ON NEW YORK: Joyce Johnson, Alfred Kazin** and **Phillip Lopate**
February	4	**Doris Lessing**
	11	**THE TENTH MUSE: Amy Clampitt** introduces **Julia Budenz, Melissa Green** and **Kathleen Norris**
	25	**Norman Mailer** reads from his new novel
	27	**MEXICAN LITERATURE FESTIVAL IV : Carlos Fuentes**
March	4	**Robert Hass** and **Daniel Halpern**
	11	**Amos Oz,** Israel novelist and essayist
	18	**Hayden Carruth** and **Lynne Sharon Schwartz**
	25	**THE TENTH MUSE II: Galway Kinnell** introduces **Carol Conroy, Toi Derricotte** and **Li-Young Lee**
April	1	**GEOGRAPHIES II: Rick Bass** and **Gretel Ehrlich**
	8	**Philip Levine** and **Linda Bierds**
	15	**Elizabeth Spencer** and **Kaye Gibbons**
	22	**Denise Levertov** and **Christopher Gilbert** read from their work
	29	**"Discovery"/*The Nation* 1991 Poetry Contest Winners**
May	6	**Abraham Sutzkever,** Preeminent Yiddish poet
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direct responsibility for funding decisions. The fact that the N.E.A. provides only partial funding for any institutional project and operates largely in concert with state arts councils established a nationwide base of support and further diluted its accountability. In addition, the bulk of its funds have gone to support politically and aesthetically conservative institutions like major art museums, orchestras and opera and ballet companies.

Nonetheless, the history of the N.E.A. is replete with an astonishing level of conflict for such a tiny agency: struggles over financing "artistic excellence" versus emphasis on "broadening access to culture"; over the support of less-than-high art and over subsidization of experimental work often unrecognized as art by the localities to which it has been offered. In addition, the club of "family values," that basic element of American political rhetoric since the Civil War, was wielded by the endowment's opponents throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Stress was laid on the effeminacy of ballet dancers, and much was made of the fact that Erica Jong thanked the endowment for aid during the writing of *Fear of Flying*.

Meanwhile, what we might call the Congressional Yahoo faction came to be joined, in a curious alliance, by highbrow cultural conservatives like Hilton Kramer, who as art critic for *The New York Times* criticized N.E.A. grant-making policy during the 1970s and continued his attacks as editor of *The New Criterion*, founded in 1982 with money from a number of right-wing sources, including the John M. Olin Foundation [see Jon Wiener, "Dollars for Neocon Scholars," January 1]. Kramer directed his polemic both at such easy targets as the logrolling habits of the N.E.A.'s grant-giving panels and at the endowment's support for what he called "a dedicated alliance of artists, academics, and so-called activists" attempting "to politicize the life of art in this country." Such people were typically "opposed to just about every policy of the United States government except the one that put money in their own pockets"; giving them that money was "supplying the rope to those who are eager to see us hanged." The Heritage Foundation's 1981 volume of policy recommendations for "a Conservative Administration," *Mandate for Leadership*, contained a paper on the N.E.H. and N.E.A. by Olin executive director Michael Joyce. After suggesting that "as a true friend of democracy, the NEH can teach the nation the limits of equalitarian [*sic*] impulse," Joyce indicated the need for the N.E.A. to turn from "politically calculated goals of social policy" (like the promotion of regional folk arts or attempts to reach minority audiences) to a renewed stress on "excellence" and the "cultivation of audiences with a true desire for high-quality artistic experience."

The Heritage Foundation's recommendations suited the tenor of the times, in this as in other areas of federal policy. Opposition to arts spending gained strength with the general turn against state expenditures (other than military ones) during the 1980s. The Reagan government attempted to cut the endowment's funding by half as part of David Stockman's implementation of what George Bush once called "voodoo economics." As a member of Stockman's team explained to Livingston Biddle, then chair of the endowment, the N.E.A. "was supporting art that the people did not want or understand, art of no real value." The political strength built up by the arts during the preceding fifteen years was visible, however, in the success with which this challenge was beaten back by pro-culture legislators.

The twenty-odd senators who joined Jesse Helms last year in protesting Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* as "shocking, abhorrent and completely undeserving of any recognition whatsoever"—especially that of the N.E.A.—were thus following the example of earlier art-bashers. One novelty of the situation was the involvement of a number of conservative direct-mail operations, like the Rev. Donald Wildmon's American Family Association, whose newsletter is sent to around 400,000 addresses, including more than 170,000 churches. This sort of outfit has generally occupied itself on the cultural front with various forms of "popular" production, from politically liberal and risqué TV shows to rock-and-roll lyrics to neighborhood porn shops to movies—such as Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*, which Wildmon picketed in 1988. The extension of this malevolent interest to the high arts reflects the national media exposure won by forms of elite culture during the last decade—due in part to the efforts of the N.E.A. The vast letter-writing campaigns that organizations like Wildmon's are able to instigate do not seem to reflect the trend of general public opinion (according to some recent polls, at any rate), but they do represent a mass of voters willing to be mobilized, and politicians, especially those not fond of "atheistic,

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anti-American" imagery themselves, are ready to respond to them as they have to the anti-choicers on abortion. When Jesse Helms, originally alerted by a Wildmon mailing to the peril to Christian values posed by the N.E.A., followed Alfonse D'Amato in bringing it to the attention of the Senate, he met with virtually no serious resistance, and his now-famous anti-obscenity amendment, tacked on to last year's appropriations bill, passed with ease (its later modification left its bite intact).

However, what the future will bring the N.E.A. is far from clear. Arts institutions and professionals have begun to rally around the endowment, and they seem to have succeeded in mustering support from the art-consuming public. A few restrictive decisions of the N.E.A. have recently been called into question or reversed. The issue will in the short run be dealt with politically, under the constraints of re-election campaigns and Congressional wheeling and dealing. It is possible that the arts have by now risen to such a position of ideological importance, with modernism itself a staple of the status quo, that their claims will override those of more antiquated "family values"—this is certainly true for the social system as a whole, whatever happens in Washington under the pressure of local and national politics.

Defenders of the N.E.A. and of freedom of state-funded expression tend, like their antagonists, to invoke "American values," celebrating the arts as a natural feature of a "free society." A recent advertisement placed in *The New York Times* by the Art Dealers Association of America is typical in citing the Constitution and "the right of free expression which is one of the core values of a democratic society." This ideological unity explains how one and the same organization—Philip Morris Inc.—can support both sides of the controversy, funding the arts lavishly and distributing copies of the Bill of Rights as a promotional gimmick, while supporting the re-election campaign of Jesse Helms, a great friend of the tobacco industry.

The basic liberal argument was concisely stated by Richard Oldenburg, director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, writing recently in MoMA's *Members Quarterly*. He identified the two fundamental issues at stake as the continuance of government arts funding and freedom of expression. The first is important because "support for the arts

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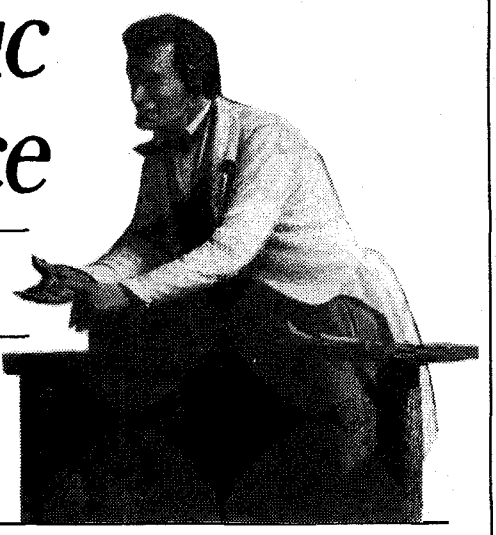

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is support for creativity, a national resource essential to our future and a source of our pride and identity as a nation." And "creativity requires freedom of expression," including the liberty "to explore new paths which may occasionally test our tolerance." Oldenburg echoes pro-art politicians and N.E.A. chair John Frohnmayer in pointing out how few grants have been controversial out of the 85,000 made since 1965. Like any investment, investment in creativity can be expected to miss the mark occasionally, but, according to Oldenburg, "this is a small and necessary price to pay for nourishing imagination, for respecting diversity, and for protecting our rights as individuals." From this point of view, the only important issue is control of the grant-giving process, which should clearly be in the hands of art professionals—"experts," as they are regularly called—rather than in the clutches of politicians, whatever their stripe. As Anthony Lewis put it in a summertime column in *The New York Times*, "When politicians get into the business of deciding what is legitimate art, the game is up."

The other side has two basic responses to these claims. According to Congressman Philip Crane, "Funding art, whether that art is considered outstanding or obscene, is not a legitimate, nor is it a needed, function of the federal government." But in any case, he continues, if art is to receive state support, "Congress has a responsibility to its constituents to determine what type of art taxpayers' dollars will support." This does not constitute censorship, such arguments go: No one is preventing artists from doing whatever kind of work they wish; but the taxpayers are under no obligation to pay for work they find senseless or offensive.

Artist friends who listen to talk radio all day in their studios tell me that this sentiment seems to be widely shared, even by many opposed to censorship of expression in the arts (this is also the implication of a recent *Newsweek* poll). In part, this is no doubt a reflection of the enduring American uneasiness with sexuality, visible, for example, in the ambivalence many feel regarding the availability of pornography. But it also seems to express resentment of artists, apparently thought of by many Americans as a species of welfare frauds, living high on the hog on government grants, free to devote themselves to their peculiar pleasures and childish occupations.

Such attitudes have deep historical roots. For one thing, since their elaboration as a distinct domain of activity in the centuries between the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution, the fine arts have drawn their meaning in part from the contrast between free, creative activity and labor directed toward the earning of money. The noncommercial soul of this department of luxury-goods production, visible particularly in the bohemian flavor of the avant-garde, is essential to art's social role as sanctifier of a commercial society: The love of art marks the bourgeoisie as the legitimate inheritor of the civilization of the past, and heir to its ruling elites. At the same time, it makes the artist at once an impractical, childish figure and a standing reproach to the devotees of the bottom line. These remain important features of the modern idea of art, though that concept has been changing rapidly in recent decades, as a few artists have achieved wealth and celebrity status, while bourgeois society has become more confident about its own value system, and so more at ease with the commodity character of works of art.

Since one important social function of art in the modern world has been as an indicator of class position, it is not surprising that it is seen by many in low-income brackets as a possession of the elite. In fact it is. Members of the corporate elite dominate the boards of trustees that govern art institutions. And what little statistical survey work has been done indicates that, despite the enormous enlargement of the art-consuming public since the mid-1960s, that public is still overwhelmingly drawn from upper-class and professional groups, with (for instance) blue-collar workers contributing a negligible percentage. This lends a certain plausibility to the efforts made so kindly on their behalf by servants of social power like Jesse Helms "to stop the liberals from spending taxpayers' money on perverted, deviant art," as Helms put it in a fundraising letter. But to begin with, it must be remembered that the public allegedly represented by the politicians who speak for it has very little to do with what goes on at the heights of power. As artist Richard Bolton pointed out in a recent article in *New Art Examiner*, "The recent outrage over art was not fueled by popular rebellion, but by extremists with narrow and self-serving agendas, by politicians who like to be in the news, and by a news media driven by sensationalism." At any rate, those who, like *Times* columnist William Safire, urge an end to "forced arts-patronizing," fail

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to extend the principle they invoke to other government expenditures: the millions sent to the Nicaraguan *contras*, for example, or the billions expended on Star Wars and the Hubble space telescope. It is true, of course, that the government's money is at base a deduction from the social product, taken from and spent without much say on the part of the producers. To question this arrangement, however, is tantamount to demanding the abolition of the state, something hardly intended by Safire, Helms or the Heritage Foundation.

What they really have in mind, of course, is that the state should fund only art already certified as "great"—that preserved in museums and concert halls, or approved by conservative critics, the aesthetic component of the canon of cultural literacy promoted by such as Allan Bloom (another Olin Foundation beneficiary, incidentally). In a *Times* Op-Ed piece ("Say No to Trash") commending the Corcoran Gallery in Washington for its last-minute refusal of the Mapplethorpe show, *New Criterion* publisher Samuel Lipman, a Reagan appointee to the N.E.A. supervisory National Council of the Arts, urged public art support to "more fully concentrate on what it does so well: the championing of the great art of the past, its regeneration in the present and its transmission to the future." It should refuse to promote art whose raison d'être is its ability to outrage the public by dealing with extremities of the human condition. More, of course, than sadomasochistic or supposedly blasphemous imagery is at stake here. What is to go, opponents of the N.E.A. generally agree, is, above all, artists and institutions on the social fringe—gay and lesbian performance artists, feminist video makers, Latino photographers and theater groups, black poets and painters.

We are not speaking here of an avant-garde in the traditional sense. These artists are not working outside the system, but for the most part are struggling to improve their places inside it; however politically motivated or oppositional in form or content their work may be, they are on the margins of official art or even—like Mapplethorpe—well ensconced within it. And indeed, while the Congressional philistines tend to disparage the claims of such as Serrano that they produce art at all, for a more sophisticated critic like Kramer, the issue is not, strictly speaking, an aesthetic one. While he sadly knew of no way to exclude Map-

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plethorpe's work "from the realm of art itself," he wrote in the *Times*, the problem is that "not all forms of art are socially benign in either their intentions or their effects." Despite Kramer's frequent fulminations against the intrusion of political values into the realm of art, he here demanded that a "social or moral standard" be consulted in determining what sort of art the government should support.

For Kramer, like Lipman, the misdeeds of the N.E.A. reflect the decline of decency throughout the culture, in high and popular art alike, and so the erosion of the power of those who think like him. "Unfortunately," Kramer wrote, "professional opinion in the art world can no longer be depended upon to make wise decisions in these matters." For Helms and Co. the arts represent an issue far easier to campaign on than the savings and loan scandal or the coming depression. For art institutions, too, the struggle over the N.E.A. provides a comfortable spot to take a stand. One museum curator remarked to me how handily protesting the threat of N.E.A. censorship obviated paying attention to the everyday censorship that goes on in the bulwarks of culture. Every choice of an exhibition to mount or a program to perform, of course, implies a decision not to show or play something else. Such choices are powerfully subject to forces emanating from donors and potential donors, corporate sponsors and the tastes of the sought-after audience. The most visible case is the deadly limitation of orchestral and opera repertories to a small number of works that can be depended on not to disturb listeners; it is well known that the playing of too much twentieth-century music, for instance, leads directly to a decline in ticket sales and diminished support. A more blatantly political example was the Boston Pops Orchestra's refusal to honor its contract for a performance by Vanessa Redgrave after her statements in favor of Palestinian claims to nationhood; a famous case from the land of modern art was the Guggenheim's cancellation of Hans Haacke's planned solo show in 1971 when the artist refused to withdraw three works judged "inappropriate" by the director of the museum.

The N.E.A. has indeed provided space at the margins which made life easier for many artists and provided an expansion of cultural production beyond that which would have been fostered by the market or private philanthropy alone. To take the case of theater, for example, while there were just fifty-six nonprofit theaters in the United States in 1965, there are more than 400 at present—and every Pulitzer Prize–winning play since 1976 has had its initial production at a nonprofit. Given the endowment's important role in direct arts financing and in stimulating private patronage (on average, N.E.A. funding brings with it three times as much in private and state moneys) in the mainstream as well as at the margins, the Helms amendment and its ilk have a chilling effect on artists and institutions. I am not qualified to judge whether restrictions such as those proposed by Helms are, as some lawyers claim, unconstitutional. But that is certainly political—it is the use of the state to foster some tastes at the expense of others—and it is certainly censorship. Lipman makes the issue clear: "In a free society, it is neither possible nor desirable to go very far [!] in prohibiting the private activities that inspire this outré art," he wrote apropos of Mapplethorpe. But, he continues, to believe that "because we are not compelled to witness what we as individuals find morally unacceptable, we cannot refuse to make it available for others" ignores the dreadful effects of "this decadence" on us and our children and "our responsibility for others." The president of the Massachusetts branch of Morality in Media put it more pithily: "People looking at these kind of pictures become addicts and spread AIDS."

This faith in the power of images for good or evil appears to involve a deep suspicion that seemingly decent Americans will be overwhelmed by dark forces within them that such images might unleash. It is no accident that the assault on the N.E.A. gathered steam during the regime that produced the Meese Report on obscenity. The current denunciations of "filth" continue key aspects of the traditional discourse on pornography: When Helms displayed the offending Mapplethorpes to his colleagues in the Senate, he first asked that the room be cleared of women and children. Sexual imagery, however distasteful, is permissible as the private possession of (exclusive groups of) males. What has made pictures like Mapplethorpe's an issue is, in Kramer's words, "the demand that is now being made to accord these hitherto forbidden images the status of perfectly respectable works of art," thus eligible for exhibition in public institutions. Kramer, like other antipornographers, is no doubt fighting a losing battle; the principle of the free-

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enterprise system so loved by all the advocates of decency—we may note here the double celebrity of Charles Keating, once chief enemy of sin in Cincinnati and now defending his haul from the Lincoln savings and loan—that the customer is always right, leads ineluctably to the free flow of all categories of images throughout society. And art, having for centuries been a home of the erotic and (especially since the invention of photography) the documentary, is hardly likely to cease supplying images of powerful and fascinating sorts to publics seeking titillation, exaltation or even the shock of the horrific.

The argument that the state ought not to fund work repugnant to "community standards" is not a good one, since it rests on the idea of a homogeneous community, with clearly demarcated standards, which does not in fact exist. (This is of course a basic problem with the going legal definition of obscenity, even apart from that definition's dependence on such undefined concepts as an appeal to "prurient interest" and lack of serious "artistic value.") On the other hand, the argument that art should be allowed to develop freely typically rests (as in Oldenburg's formulation quoted above) on the assumption that the development of the arts represents an interest of "society"—a unified interest that also does not exist. Present-day society is made up not only of classes with antagonistic interests but of a multitude of groups whose differences are expressed in aesthetic as well as other terms. For this reason, the idea that there exists an aesthetic sphere untouched by social and political meaning is an ideological fiction, one recognized even in the muddled thinking of a would-be censor like Kramer. The problem is not that art has been politicized; the existence of state funding shows that the generally hidden political side of the arts has existed all along. The struggle over the N.E.A. is a struggle for control of this political side.

If the N.E.A. is eliminated or seriously restricted, the loss of funds will be a tragedy for many artists and art institutions, though a smaller one than the loss of school lunches or federally funded abortions taken away from other sectors of society as part of the same political effort. Despite the stimulus of this threat (and its so-far-piecemeal realization), it is not to be expected that many artists or the art business and its hangers-on will come out in clear opposition to the social order to which they must look for sup-

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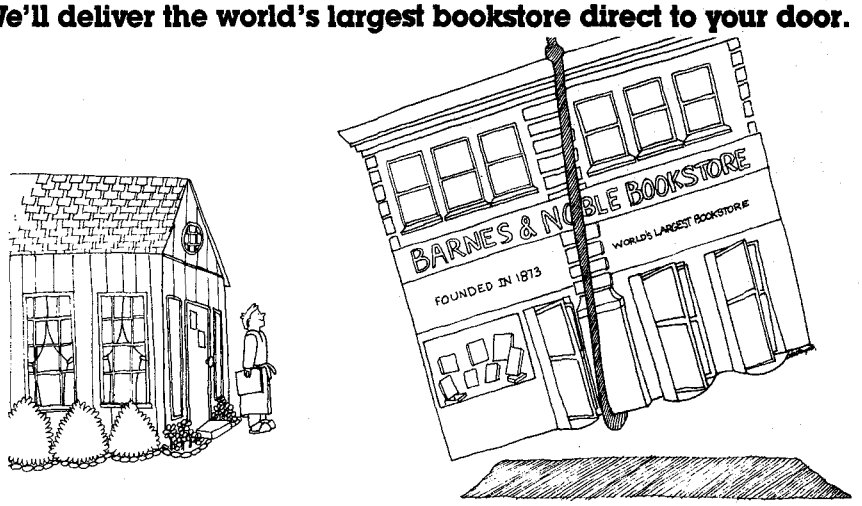

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port. We can expect the next year to bring large helpings of explicitly political art, in many cases reflecting no great understanding of the nature of contemporary society but riding what is already visible as a new wave of "official"—shown, funded and collected—art. We may also see intelligent and effective political art, such as the exemplary work done (without benefit of government grants) by graphic artists associated with ACT UP. Other artists will continue to utilize and transform the resources of their mediums to explore and shape their experience in ways not explicitly political. For all concerned with the arts, however, the current struggle over funding constitutes a call to grapple with the political issues inherent in artworks and institutions.

Defending art and artists against both the know-nothings and the champions of Kramer's version of "the high purposes and moral grandeur" of art should lead us not to blind support of the N.E.A. but, for instance, to pondering its function as a facilitator of the aesthetic rituals of upper-class life. We might consider the use of cultural events as meeting places for politicians and businesspeople. We might take on the politics of the art world itself; as an editorial in *New Art Examiner* asked, "While it is necessary to rally the field against censorship by the right, why is it not necessary to rally the field against censorship by insiders? Why shouldn't we deal with the abuses of a closed panel system? Why shouldn't we examine the cronyism of organizations, artist's spaces, and publications, who year after year receive NEA funding, and who supply the NEA with peer review panel members and site visitors?" Short of radical social transformation, of course, few changes are to be expected in the workings of the institution of art. But the discussion opened up by Senator Helms and his friends can lead us to ponder the nature of the institution, and of the different roles that the arts could play for artists and publics seeking to redefine them and their place in social life.

For those of us who take a critical stance toward the existing social system, the Wildmons and Lipmans must be resisted—not, however, in the name of the myths of American democracy or the transcendent value of art but simply in opposition to reaction. What is objectionable about the attacks on the Mapplethorpe exhibition, *Piss Christ*, Karen Finley et al. is not the injection of politics into the sacred precincts of art by a bunch of barbarians. It is the right-wing agenda itself—the call for austerity and the distrust of creativity in all spheres of life other than those of corporate profitability. Opposing this means the effort to explore, in analysis and, where possible, in practice, the complex relations of art to present-day society and to the possibility of changing it. □

Past Present

TIMOTHY CROUSE

"You've never heard of Sillanpää?" the poet David Rosenmann-Taub asked me. "Well, you will see: He is a *writer*. When you have read him, you will know the art of modesty." Only three of the many volumes by the Finnish author Frans Eemil Sillanpää have been translated into English, and until recently they were not just out of print but virtually unobtainable, even in libraries. Yet, as sometimes happens when one seeks objects that wish to be sought, I seemed not so much to locate these books as to attract them. The first, *People in the Summer Night* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), was waiting for me on the remainder shelf of a bookstore. The second, *Meek Heritage* (Knopf, 1938, in a handsome Borzoi edition with many of its pages still uncut), seemed to materialize under my hand on the book table of a church fair. The third, *The Maid Silja* (Macmillan, 1933), eluded me for many months. Then I was seized by a conviction that my late friend, Saima Natti Hancock, a Finn, must have owned a copy. I asked her husband, the sculptor Walker Hancock, to see if he could find it in their house. He searched in vain. So convinced was I, however, that I begged him to try again. This time he went to the attic; *Silja* was the first thing that caught his eye.

Sillanpää lived from 1888 to 1964; in 1939 he became the first Finn to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. The son of a peasant, he revealed an aptitude for natural science and was sent to the University of Helsinki to study biology. However, he soon fell in with artists and musicians (Sibelius among them), abandoned his studies and returned home, determined to become a writer. Within five years he had published a novel and a collection of short stories, both well received. In 1918, when he was 30, revolution broke out in his country among the lower-class "Reds" and was crushed by the middle-class "Whites." This brief but horrific civil war, the great national trauma of Finland, overshadows climactic scenes in both *Meek Heritage* (1919) and *The Maid Silja* (1931). What strikes the reader at once is the artistic objectivity that Sillanpää was able to achieve while describing a conflict whose hatreds had scarcely begun to cool. His perspective is scientific and infinitely remote (as if he were analyzing his own time from a thousand years in the future), yet also vivid and immediate. This uncanny double vision is one of his most unusual characteristics.

IN THIS REVIEW

The Maid Silja and *Meek Heritage* are back in print. *The Maid Silja* ($17.95) may be ordered from Cherokee Publishing, Box 1730, Marietta, GA 30061, 800-548-8778; *Meek Heritage* ($5.95) is available from Paul S. Eriksson, 208 Battell Bldg., Middlebury, VT 05753, 802-388-7303. The Crawford Press, P.O. Box 669, Alameda, CA 94501, is planning to bring out both books in a single volume.

People in the Summer Night (1934) leaves the civil war behind and takes up another of Sillanpää's favorite themes, the night that never grows dark. Again, the style contains a paradox. Page by page, scene by scene, the writing is so factual, so direct, that we can easily reduce the episodes to headlines: "Raftsman Stabs Boatmate in Brawl"; "Doctor Arrives Late at Childbed." Yet the overall effect is one of poetry. How can this be? Partly it is the musical structure of the whole, with themes and episodes interwoven as in a tone poem. Partly it is the vision of humans as natural phenomena, springing from the earth like plants, never losing their connection to the farms, lakes and forests. Partly it is the way the author, like a lark, soars and swoops, soars and swoops, giving us now a panoramic, now a close-up view of his characters as

Timothy Crouse, author of The Boys on the Bus *(Ballantine), lives in New York and is writing a novel. Past Present is an occasional column edited by Gwyneth Cravens.*

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they crisscross the landscape. And finally, the pervasive metaphor of the summer night, enclosing every creature in its comforting maternal embrace. But beyond all these reasons lies the fact that Sillanpää cannot help doing the thing, any more than Melville can avoid metaphysical overtones: His dry prose insists on blooming into lyricism.

The virtues of these books as compelling stories, as prose poems, even as social history, show forth from the first page on. But one soon begins to notice other, deeper levels. *The Maid Silja* opens with the solitary death, at the age of 22, of the pretty orphaned farm maid of the title. Then it returns to the girl's origins and takes us through the main events of her life. To summarize these is to risk seeming to mock them. Brother, sister, mother succumb to disease; father, who adores Silja, takes to drink, loses the estate and dies; Silja finds work on a farm, and the farmer's brother attempts to rape her; she falls in love with a young man, but no sooner do they consummate their passion than he is called away to his dying mother; in the civil war she tries to help people on both sides, unaware of the dangers; and so on, through more travails, until she starts to spit up blood.

This material emerges newborn: Sillanpää proceeds as if no one had ever before written of poverty, orphanhood, thwarted love or consumption. His voice is gruff, almost sardonic (very much the voice that we would expect from the rugged round bald head that glowers from his photograph in *Twentieth Century Authors*). He knows how to counteract the emotional warmth of his subject by merely stating the facts. We soon forget that there is any author at all; like the Gospels, this book seems to have sprung from some general, timeless wisdom.

The story is a simple frame for his real subject, which is almost impossibly ambitious and complex: the history of a human soul (and, by extension, the history of *the* human soul). He addresses this subject specifically, questingly, with an earnest determination to be precise. What part does the soul play in the life as a whole? What are the milestones in the soul's journey? In one scene—it is a sunny spring day, with life quickening all around—little Silja asks her father what makes the lake outside their cottage so alive, "like lots of little bright animals on it."

> The mirror was taken from its peg beside the window and father had to show how the lake's surface glittered. . . . The play of the sunbeam was so hugely exciting to Silja that it was vain to speak to her of waves in connection with it. Unwearyingly the child flashed the beam along the walls, the floor, the stove, and her mirth overflowed when the idea struck her of flashing it on her father's coat, then on his chin and lastly in his eyes, so that he had to shut them and turn his head away.

Sillanpää is a Tolstoy of everyday life. For him, the facts of daily existence take on epic proportions: A sunbeam can loom larger than a civil war. Silja's affinity for light springs from the depths of her soul, which itself is shining. Each person's inner reality is the only reality—secret, unique, ultimately unfathomable by others. The outer world of newspapers, society, universal history is so much smoke. Over every page of this novel hovers the ancient Nordic notion of *wyrd*—a personal fate unfolding inexorably from within. The soul receives impressions and transforms them into destiny. Silja's

> senses developed, their circle of observation widened. Every impression sent through them by the life around her to the storehouse of her consciousness remained there, though some of them sank at once into such distant recesses that the keeper of the storehouse, the human being that was Silja, would never when grown up believe they were there; though they failed not to exert their influence even from their secret hiding place.

All the action swirling around Silja serves to point up, by contrast, the great stillness that she contains. Many things happen to her physical person, but to her incorruptible essence—a faraway star—nothing happens. "In all her consciousness there was no room for disappointment," Sillanpää tells us. She is thrown into disorder only once, by the sudden departure of her lover. Even from that blow she recovers, and goes on to "smilingly fulfill her fate." Is she a Pollyanna, then? No. To recognize and accept one's fate without bitterness is by no means a false or passive exercise; on the contrary, it takes more strength, insight and forbearance of truth than most people possess or care to acquire.

Who is Silja? What does this soul of hers consist of? What makes her act as she does? I read the book a second time, then a third, but its mysteries only deepened.

And so it was partly in the hope of gleaning further clues that I turned to the

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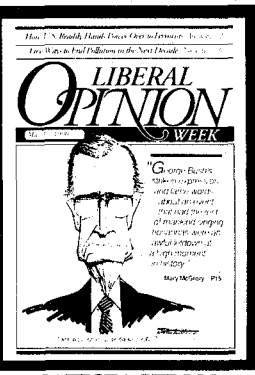

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earlier novel, *Meek Heritage*. (The English title seems infelicitous. I am told by Finns that the original means "saintly destitution" and has a biblical ring to it, reminiscent of Job. Otherwise Alexander Matson, who also translated *Silja*, produces a plain, readable, sincere-sounding prose, somewhat similar to Constance Garnett's translations of Chekhov.) *Meek Heritage* also begins with a death and goes on to trace the life that led to it. At first glance, it appears that the protagonist could not be more different from Silja:

> Jussi . . . Toivola . . . was a repulsive-looking old fellow [the book begins]. During the latter part of his life he was entirely bald except for a fringe of hair, clipped on some unknown past date, that stuck out under his cap over his ears and at his neck. His face, too, was covered with a mongrel growth of tangled hair; only the sharp nose was clearly visible. This was because hair grew round his eyes as well, and as the peak of his cap cast a shadow, one saw in that region of his face only two sunken harsh points of light into which no decent person cared to look.

Nobody loves Jussi; nor does he even hope to be loved. His childhood is one long story of abuse and neglect, his marriage a desolation. With time, he evolves into the village crank, preaching politics and religion to people even more ignorant than himself. The deaths of one of his children, then of his wife, far from causing him grief, fill him with a promise of release; but soon his burdens begin to smother him again. What attracts him to the revolution is mainly the bread and soup at the local Red headquarters, and the expectation of companionship. But here, too, everything goes sour, and he ends up condemned by the Whites for a murder he did not commit. Standing in an open grave, holding up his dirty underpants, mumbling a prayer to Jesus, he is "blown into the mighty all-embracing state of being known as death without a 'last thought' of any kind."

Once again, the story forms a rushing background to the author's deepest concerns. It is the two harsh points of light in Jussi's face that fascinate Sillanpää. He stares into them and finds an utter innocent, an unwitting saint, a Christ who scarcely even thinks of himself as Christian. Compared to Jussi, Silja is rich. She moves in a world of light—the light of intelligent innocence, self-comprehension, hope and love. The love forms a kind of protection for her, like a thin dress to clothe the body of her soul. Jussi's soul, unloved, goes naked, moving through life like a barefoot man on a thorny path. He is simplicity itself, with the absolute minimum of hopes and illusions. He suffers that total solitude which is the ultimate destitution but can also be the straightest way to salvation. Both souls are small lights in the darkness; they do not find what they are looking for, and they move on. But in Jussi's darkness there is more clarity than in Silja's light.

It is one of the least examined literary axioms of our time, a commonplace of nearly every writing course, that the protagonist of a novel must invariably undergo some transformation. In Sillanpää we come smack up against the opposite. And he appears all the more modern, revolutionary and profound for presenting protagonists who remain fixed. They are, in fact, like trees—fully alive yet immovably rooted. They have fidelity; they do not know how to defend themselves; they need protection. A story without a story. What is the plot of a tree?

Is it the author who changes during the course of these books? What was slightly clear at the beginning has become completely enigmatic by the end: a labyrinth. When I saw Rosenmann-Taub again, I told him that I had read the three novels and I said, "Sillanpää begins without questions and finishes without answers." He replied, "There is his originality: humility." □

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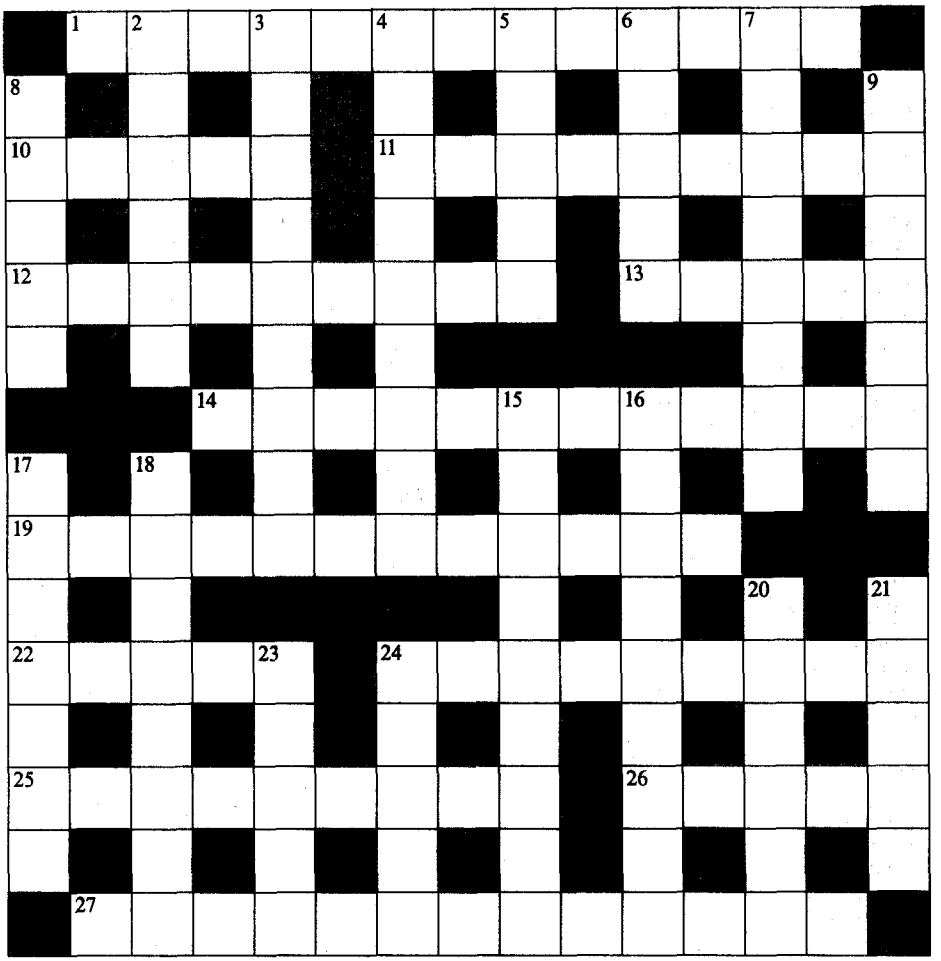
C	A	L	L	E	D	T	O	T	H	E	B	A	R	
O		O		S		O		H		V		I		W
M	E	R	I	T	E	D		E	R	I	T	R	E	A
P		E		O		O		H		L		F		L
A	L	L	I	N	A		D	A	Y	S	W	O	R	K
N		E		I		C		R				I		
I		I	N	A	W	O	R	D		P	I	L	A	U
O				N		N		W		U				P
N	O	S	E	S		C	H	A	F	F	E	D		A
		T				H		Y		F		I		N
A	L	A	R	M	I	S	T		A	P	P	E	N	D
B		N		I		H		A		A		H		D
L	I	N	E	A	G	E		G	E	S	T	A	P	O
E		I		M		L		E		T		R		W
	A	C	H	I	L	L	E	S	T	E	N	D	O	N

Crossword Puzzle No. 2305

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 See, perhaps, a Paris landmark twice, and end up with a mixed choir about quiet enough for it . . . (13)
10, 11 and 14 . . . and something with meaning to the owl, reputedly, is enough, too! (1,4,2,3,4,2,10)
12 What McCarthy always seemed to be doing, when angry? (6,3)
13 One goes from C to B naturally. (5)
14 See 10
19 Supposedly an attractive quality, but you might find poison's steep! (12)
22 Real humdingers, as they say; the old song got this back in town. (5)
24 The little woman? Look! Very good! (You might also scan her stuff!) (3,6)
25 Once we mix this, it's in a really mixed state! (3,6)
26 A legal right to hold something like E.T. (5)
27 I cry "Cold!" there, perhaps, but such power is important. (13)

DOWN

2 What they did when almost all of Detroit had trouble? (6)
3 "She don't!" is wrong but "They do have fun!" is right! (9)
4 Make a break for this? (9)
5 One might say death is sort of this! (5)
6 Newspapers made of iron, perhaps. (5)
7 At times I get involved with apes . . . (8)
8 . . . and apes get involved with you, by the sound of it so wait a bit! (5)
9 One might be sorry if one does, perhaps getting tied up in things! (7)
15 Naturally, its real name sounds humorous! (9)
16 One that rises in the world sets the price around the first day of the week to the French. (9)
17 Police state composer? (7)
18 What some do to the beans on the road, where the water runs off. (8)
20 A professional first aid worker has one in the house in old Italy. (6)
21 Perhaps a set-up flower in the factory, following Chart S. (5)
23 Stock drive? (5)
24 How can you stand what practical jokers may try to get out of you! (5)

SEE LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION AT LEFT

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